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MAN OF THE NORTH

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BY

JAMES B. HENDRYX

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

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Chapter I

ON THE RIVER

BRIAN O'NEILL took a long draught of black tea, stretched lazily, and filled his lungs deeply with the spruce-scented air. It was good to be alive—alive, and young, and foot-loose! Aspen leaves danced above him in the light breeze and made shimmering patterns on the warm earth. The droning hum of a billion mosquitoes blended into the muffled roar of the mighty rapid above whose leaping white water hung a halo of rainbow mist.

An eddying breeze sprinkled him with the white ash of his tiny wood fire and blue smoke stung his nostrils. It was the North—his North—and he loved it. The North in a gentle mood—a benevolent, tolerant North—the cradle for a million younglings. A tiger with sheathed claws basking in the warm June sunlight, thought Brian. For he knew his North in her other moods—the unyielding, indomitable North that destroys men for the mistakes they make—a lost ax, a broken paddle, the want of a match, rotten ice, jagged rocks concealed beneath foaming white water! The mocking, relentless North that kills mercifully in her howling blizzards with the stupor of her strong cold; or horribly, slowly, with the silent death grip of her muskegs and her quicksands.

Born north of sixty, the nineteen years of Brian

O'Neill's life had been lived in the land of the lakes and the rivers. The three great rivers, the Mackenzie, the Slave, and the Athabaska, had been his playground. He knew the North as few men ever know it. He had left the ashes of his little fires upon the banks of a hundred unnamed lakes, his canoe had traced unmapped rivers to their source, and his dogs had won through blizzards upon barrens that no other white man had ever crossed. Always he had followed the lure of the "just beyond." What lay behind that next ridge? What would one more bend of the river show?

There were times when necessity forced him to seek employment. For one must eat to live. Ammunition, fish nets, and gear may not be picked up on the banks of far rivers. At such times he was a welcome addition to any post or camp along the rivers, for no factor or trader from the Landing to McPherson but knew that Brian O'Neill could do anything, from the trading and grading of fur to running a scow brigade the length of the three rivers.

Field officers of the great fur companies knew his worth and time and again had offered him positions of permanence and responsibility. But always the lad turned them down. He was his own man. He would work just so long as necessity required him to work and not one moment longer. It was beautifully simple, this scheme of existence. When he had earned enough for his present requirements he would ask for his time. Disappointed factors might argue and irate ones curse, but all to no purpose. Impervious alike to argument and curses, Brian would hear them out, collect his pay, purchase his supplies, load his outfit into his canoe, and with a smile and a wave of the hand head

for God knows where. "A smart lad, but a ne'er-do-weel," agreed thrifty Scot factors when the name of Brian O'Neill was mentioned upon the rivers.

It was this need of purchase that had brought him to the upper Athabaska. He must have a new rifle—not one of the trade guns of the lower posts but a weapon of high power and flat trajectory such as one might find in Edmonton. It had been his intention to obtain work from Haldane, at the Landing, but Haldane had been removed and another had taken his place—a man to whom the name of Brian O'Neill meant nothing, else he would straightway have discharged three or four half-drunken breeds and given him place.

Refused work, he had offered his services as guide to an oil prospector who was loading two scows with equipment.

"Don't need no guide," replied the man. "Hell! Them scows couldn't get off the river if they wanted to. An' besides, these boys have be'n up an' down the river a hundred times." Brian's glance rested in amusement upon the pleasantly soused breeds. "How much you want?" demanded the man, and when he haggled over the wage Brian promptly turned on his heel and walked away.

Stepping into his canoe, he pushed into the current and headed for Fort McMurray, two hundred and fifty miles to the northward. At McMurray he would be welcomed and could work as long as he chose. What mattered that he would have to return upriver to purchase the coveted rifle? The North is patient—and Brian O'Neill was of the North.

His journey toward McMurray was unhurried. At the head of a white-water rapid he cached his canoe and,

striking out on foot, explored a creek from whose banks an Indian had told him oil oozed in such quantity as to render the water unfit to drink. He found the creek similar to a dozen others he had seen in the tar sands district, and so returned to the river, carried his canoe to the water's edge, and, as is the way of the North, brewed a pot of tea before continuing his journey to McMurray.

It was as he sat in the pleasant shade of the aspens, his eyes on the rainbow mist, that his thoughts drifted hither and yon. Were they right—the factors and the Company men who called him a ne'er-do-well because he refused to settle down to the routine of the posts—the drying of whitefish, the barter with the natives, and the baling of stinking fur? What was the end of it all? What did it get them? He thought of his father, old Kelly O'Neill, known for years as one of the best factors on the rivers, retired now to his bit of a farm on the Clearwater. Contentment? Yes, his father and mother were happy and contented in their declining years. The Company pension and the farm, with the work not overly hard, had taken care of that.

Old Kelly O'Neill, with his books and his homely philosophy of life, was loved and respected the length of the three rivers. Men often called at the log house on the Clearwater to seek his council—Company men, and men of the Mounted Police. And, because Kelly O'Neill was a man of understanding and of judgment, these went their way the wiser, the advice they received the more lasting and the more piquant because more often than not it was found hidden in intricate parables, or abstract observations seemingly rambling and irrelevant.

The lad smiled as he remembered that many of the factors, though they envied old Kelly his lot, pitied him for his ne'er-do-well son. But for Brian contentment could only come in roaming his wilderness unfettered by the restrictions of either post or farm.

The factors were wrong. But, was he himself right? What was his wilderness roving getting him? Certainly nothing in the way of worldly goods. Knowledge? Education? Would he not do better to heed the veiled hints of Kelly O'Neill, and the more direct admonitions of the good Father Giroux, and apply himself to his books? Brian frowned. Books! It was not that he was uninterested in books nor that he disliked study. All his life he had been an intermittent student at the mission, scorning curriculum, coming and going as he liked, delving here and there into subjects that interested him. But of what use was book learning to one who always had lived in the North, and who always would live in the North? Knowledge to Brian O'Neill meant knowledge of the North. Such knowledge must be gained at first hand—not read from the pages of books. See the North, explore it, fight it, live it! So, and only so, could one know the North.

A light frown clouded his brow as vague doubt assailed him. But there were things one did not understand—this oil, for instance. Where was it formed and how? Were there inexhaustible reservoirs far beneath the surface? Would men succeed in tapping these reservoirs and thereby reap a golden harvest? Already men were appearing upon the rivers with ponderous machinery, boring, prospecting for oil. A railroad was headed for Fort McMurray; it was even now completed as far as LaBiche. He had heard men talk wisely of tar

sands, of asphaltum, of petroleum, and of gas. He had listened to conjectures regarding ancient basins, tilted and drained. But what did these men know of what was taking place far below the surface of the earth? Much less, of what had taken place millions of years ago? Even the government didn't know. Look at the oil well that had been drilled years ago by the government at Pelican Portage and had produced only gas that had been burning, ever since Brian could remember, with a roar that could be heard for miles. They had found no oil, and of what use was gas that roared from a spout and shot a pillar of fire forty feet into the air? Manifestly the knowledge these men possessed was of no value for they were exploiting the oil fields to make money and none had as yet made any money.

As Brian was honest with others, so was he honest with himself. He knew that his professed scorn of book knowledge was more or less a pose adopted for the benefit of Kelly O'Neill and the good Father Giroux. That it deceived neither, he did not know—Brian O'Neill was young. He did know, however, that neither had advised his settling down at post or farm, and for these two men the lad's respect amounted almost to reverence. He chuckled, as he refilled his cup with strong black tea, at remembrance of the bit of banter he had got from his father upon his latest visit to the farm. "Chasin' the horizon is a fine thing, son—when ye come up wid ut, leave me know what lies beyant—in the meantime I'll read what they say in the books."

"Good old Kelly!" breathed the lad, aloud. "He's the best dad a fellow ever had—he understands!"

Abruptly his gaze focussed upon two black dots that appeared around a far bend of the river. Deliberately

he set the teacup upon the ground and, picking up his binoculars, scrutinized the objects minutely.

"The oil man that was at the Landing," he muttered, as the scows drifted rapidly toward him down the fast water. Suddenly his muscles tensed. "What the ——? The fools!" The foremost scow, several hundred yards in advance of the other, was sweeping to the right of a small rocky island, heading down the heavy water straight for the brink of the rock-ribbed falls. Too late the crew of six realized their peril. Dropping the sweeps, they rushed helplessly from one side to the other, pointing, wildly gesticulating.

Seeing the plight of their fellows, those on the second scow, by frantic work at the heavy oars and the long steering sweep, managed to land at the head of the little island, where they leaped ashore and stared in horror at the doomed scow which swung end for end as it struck against a submerged rock, floated loose, and struck again.

Brian O'Neill was already in his canoe. Taking skilful advantage of an eddy, he made for the head of the island, his paddle flashing wetly in the sunshine.

The North kills men for the mistakes they make. The tiger was unsheathing her claws.

Chapter II

BRIAN GETS A JOB

THE heavily loaded scow had hung up on the rock ledge over which the river plunged for a sheer drop of eight or ten feet into a smother of rock-studded white water through which nothing could pass and live. Destruction momentarily threatened the fifty-five-foot craft, a third of which overhung the lip of the fall. The six breeds that constituted her crew had crowded into the upriver end where they stood helplessly waving their arms and shouting appeals that were drowned in the roar of the rapid. And stumbling up and down the shore of the tiny island, scarce two hundred feet away, the crew of the second scow were shouting and gesticulating as futilely as were their unfortunate companions.

As Brian O'Neill stepped from his canoe into this chaos of inefficiency his arm was seized by the owner of the outfit, more abjectly helpless if possible than the breeds. "Can't you get them men off? Ain't there nothin' we can do?" he gibbered, pointing a shaking finger toward the precariously balanced scow. "They'll go over in a minute! Fer God's sake! Give you fifty dollars if you can! I'll make it a hundred!"

"Got a line?" asked Brian, shaking loose from the clutching fingers, and carefully measuring the distance with his eye.

"Sure—got plenty line. What kind of line you want?" He charged among the excited breeds. "Hey, you! Hey, you! Quit jumpin' around like a hen with his head cut off! Git back there an' git out some line!"

As two or three of the breeds started for the beached scow, Brian called after them. "It'll take two hundred—yes—two hundred and fifty feet. I want a light line for the canoe. And break out a heavy one, too. We'll try to hold the scow where she is. I can't take 'em all off at once, and the others may go on over when the first ones leave her. Maybe it's only their weight that's holding her where she is. Step lively, boys," he added to the breeds, who had calmed perceptibly when they recognized Brian O'Neill.

The lines were produced and, selecting a large rock near the lower end of the island, Brian gave instruction for snubbing the heavy line when he had made the end fast to the scow. Fastening the light line to the canoe, he took the loose end of the heavy line with him and dropped down upon the balanced scow as the men on the island paid out the lines.

As the canoe drew nearer the six breeds in the scow crowded and fought for place at the upper end. Realizing the danger if they should simultaneously leap into the frail craft, Brian signalled the island and the canoe came to a halt a dozen feet from the scow. Four of the breeds who crowded the rail he knew and, shouting to make himself heard above the roar of the fall, he called them by name. "You, Alex, and Tom Shirts, and Louis, I'll take you this trip, then we'll let the canoe down for the others. But first you've got to make this heavy line fast to the scow so they can snub her to the island. Mind now—no crowding! I'll pass the line and you make her

fast, then Tom, and Alex, and Louis slip into the canoe. You, Elisha, stay with the others till the canoe comes back for you. No fighting or shoving, or someone's going to get hurt."

Again Brian signalled, the canoe dropped down to the scow, and he passed the heavy line to eager hands. When it was made fast those on shore heaved on it and secured it by a couple of bights around the big rock. Tom Shirts was already in the canoe, and Louis, a small man, was about to lower himself from the barge when a huge breed, one of the two Brian did not know, seized the smaller man by the scruff and, hurling him back among the litter of oil gear that cluttered the scow, threw his leg over the rail, and with an insolent leer slipped into the canoe. The next moment he slumped limply against the scow, as the heel of Brian's iron-shod canoe pole crashed against the side of his head. The canoe rocked perilously and the man would have slipped into the water and been whirled over the falls had not Tom Shirts secured a firm grip on his collar.

"W'at I do?" cried the breed, with difficulty maintaining his grip as the canoe steadied herself with the inert form half in, half out of the water.

Without even a glance at the unconscious man whose face was red with blood that gushed from a long gash on his temple, Brian shrugged. "Drop him in the river or hoist him back onto the scow—it's all the same to me. He don't go this load."

Hands reached down and the man was with difficulty dragged back aboard the scow, and in grave silence Louis and Alex took their places in the canoe. It took the combined effort of those on the island to haul the light craft. The empty canoe was dropped back to the scow, the

unconscious man was lowered into her, the other two followed, and soon all were safe on the island.

The oil man counted a handful of bills which he extended toward Brian. "Here's your pay," he said grudgingly. "You earnt it."

"Go to hell," said the younger man evenly. "I don't take money for a thing like that."

Pocketing his bills, the man eyed his doomed scow ruefully. "There ain't no way to save her, I s'pose. God, I hate to lose her. There's better than two thousand dollars' worth of oil rig in that scow. I can't do no drillin' without I replace it." He paused and regarded Brian closely. "Say, ain't you the feller I tried to hire upriver fer a guide?"

"I'm the fellow you *didn't* try to hire," answered Brian, meeting the gaze squarely. "You said you didn't need a guide. Said these boys knew the river. And when I asked six dollars a day you said it was too much. If you'd hired me your scow wouldn't be where it is."

"Six a day's too much. You ain't nothin' but a kid." Brian shrugged and stepped toward his canoe. The other followed him to the water's edge. "I s'pose she'd break all to hell if she went on through," he speculated, his eyes on the long reach of white water.

"There wouldn't be enough left of her to light a fire with."

"You couldn't figger no way to save her?" he persisted.

"Yes, I could save her."

The man's look of astonishment gave way to a gleam of hope. "*You* could! Tell you what I'll do: you git that scow off, an' I'll hire you fer the balance of the trip."

"I'll tie that scow up here on the island beside the

other for a hundred dollars. It ought to be worth a hundred to save two thousand, besides the time you'd lose. I don't feel the same way about scows that I do about men."

The man hesitated as his glance took in the scow, the little rocky island, the heavy line, the breeds grouped near the centre of the island shamelessly passing black bottles back and forth. Evidently no idea for the salvaging of his own property occurred to him, for he turned again to Brian. "How and the hell do you figger on workin' it?" he asked. "It took the half of us to pull that little canoe up agin the current with the four of you in it."

"Is it a deal?"

"Yes, damn it—it's a deal! If you can get that scow back up here it's worth the hundred to find out how you do it."

Taking Tom Shirts with him, Brian paddled ashore and, cutting a couple of spruce trees, towed them back to the island. With these and some chain and wire line that he found in the scow, he rigged a Spanish windlass, and with all hands on the capstan the scow was hauled slowly back to the island.

"'Course, it was my chains an' line you used, an' my crew," ventured the man as he counted the money. "I'd ought, by rights, to charge you up with them men's time."

"It wasn't time you needed," answered Brian. "It was brains. If you'd had any of your own you wouldn't have had to buy mine."

"You're pretty cocky, ain't you?" growled the other as he handed over the money. "But I ain't the one to

haggle over a few dollars. Is there any more bad water between here an' McKay."

"You haven't seen any bad water yet. Yes, there's plenty more ahead."

The man stared out over the rapids. "I s'pose I've got to hire you at six a day fer the balance of the trip."

"Ten a day."

"Ten! You said six, upriver!"

"Yes, but that was several days ago. It'll cost you more now."

"It ain't worth it! I won't pay no such wages! You can't hold me up!"

Brian laid hold of his canoe, and, remembering the lad's abrupt departure at the Landing, the man capitulated. "Hold on! Damn it! If I got to, I got to! I can't afford to lose no scow."

"All right," answered Brian. "I'll take your outfit down. But first I've got to go to Edmonton."

"Edmonton!" cried the man. "What d'you mean, Edmonton? Hell—it'll take you a week! D'you think I'm goin' to hang up on this here rock pile in the middle of the river fer a week while you go kihootin' off to Edmonton?"

Brian shrugged. "Do as you please," he said. "Wait here—go ashore and wait—or try to get to McKay without me. You tried once—maybe you'll have better luck next time. It's all the same to me."

"Look-a' here—time's money to me. The quicker I get to McKay, the quicker I can start drillin'. The summer ain't none too long up in this God-forsaken country, nohow, they say. Why didn't you go to Edmonton when you was upriver, if you're so hell-bent to go?"

"I had no money then. I need a rifle—a better gun than can be bought at the posts——"

"A rifle! What kind of a rifle? I got a rifle—brother-in-law give it to me—said I might get a shot at a bear or a moose or somethin'. But I ain't no hand to hunt. He claimed it was a good one."

"Let me see it. If it is what I want I'll buy it, if you care to sell."

"Sure I'll sell it, if I can save a week's time. I won't git no time to hunt nohow."

The man went to the scow and returned with the rifle and several boxes of ammunition. It was a beauty, of a make and pattern of which Brian often had dreamed and had hoped some day to own. The calibre, too, was right. Evidently the brother-in-law of the oil man was a connoisseur of guns.

"What will you take for it?" asked the lad.

"What'll you give me?" parried the man. "I don't know nothin' about rifles. Looks like it ought to be worth around fifty dollars."

"It's worth more than that," said Brian. "I'll give you the hundred you just paid me—and at that I'm getting a bargain."

The man stared. "Well, I'll tell the world you're honest, anyway! Fork over the change. The gun's yourn. An' I'll throw in the shells."

Methodically, Brian counted out some bills which he handed over.

"Hey—there's only forty dollars here!" cried the man.

"Yes," answered Brian, returning the remaining bills to his pocket. "The sixty is mine. It will take six days to tie this outfit up at McKay."

The man flushed hotly. "Collectin' your pay in advance, eh? How do I know you'll stick through to McKay?"

"You don't. But I do."

Despite his annoyance the man grinned. "I'm bettin' you will, at that. I kind of like your way of goin' at things—now I've got used to it. Anyways, I'll breathe a damn sight easier than what I have be'n. I ain't had nothin' but trouble ever since I first seen the river. How we goin' to git the scows offen this island?"

Brian indicated the left-hand channel. "We'll track-line 'em around those rocks and shove into an eddy that will slant us across the river. The channel is on the other side. Your Injuns would have known enough to hold to the other bank if they hadn't been too drunk to notice where they were."

At mention of his crew the man scowled and bellowed an order. "Hey, you—git to work an' stow them chains an' lines!" He turned to Brian with a growl of disgust. "Laziest, good-for-nothin'est crowd I ever seen. When they ain't swizzlin' rot-gut, they're ashore guzzlin' tea! An' eat! Damnedest hogs goin'! Four-five meals a day, an' believe me, they take their time about 'em! What with sixteen-eighteen hours of daylight, I bet we ain't averaged over two hours a day on the river!"

Brian grinned. "Better let me handle them," he advised. "I can just about double your running time. They'll drink no more whisky. They'll still drink plenty of tea and eat their four or five meals. It's their way. No one can change them. They've been doing it that way for two hundred and fifty years."

"You're welcome to the job," answered the man, a note of respect in his voice. "A man finds out sometimes

that he's got a hell of a lot to learn. But how you goin' to cut down on the booze? They'll all quit."

Brian shook his head. "They won't quit. They saw that you were new to the country and they took advantage of you. Always they are permitted to stay reasonably soused during the loading of the scows. But once on the river tea takes the place of whisky. They won't quit because they know that I know that." Turning abruptly away, he walked toward the breeds, who had paid not the slightest heed to the bellowed command of the oil man. Tom Shirts and the man called Elisha arose as he approached, the others remained squatted upon the ground. Half a dozen bottles, partially emptied of their contents, stood among the stones. Brian halted beside the group and in silence allowed his glance to rest for an appreciable moment upon each upturned face. Then he tapped his chest lightly with his forefinger. "I am running this outfit down to McKay. Me—Brian O'Neill—I'm boss." Pausing to let the information soak in, he stepped among them and one by one picked up the bottles and smashed them against the rocks. With the last bottle shattered, he spoke again. "Go get the rest of it. Every bottle."

The four whom Brian had called by name, together with the crew of the second scow, rummaged among their effects and returned with two or three bottles apiece. "Smash 'em," ordered Brian, and when the men complied he turned to the other two. "Where's your whisky?" he demanded.

The smaller man backed away a step. "Me, A'm ain' got no wheesky."

"You lie," answered Brian quietly. "And when I

find it I'm going to smash the bottles over your head." He turned to the big breed who had attempted to board the canoe out of turn. The man sat propped against a stone, blinking groggily and holding a filthy rag to his head. Brian stooped over him. "Take that rag away," he ordered, and when the man gingerly lowered it Brian examined the wound. "Got to take a few stitches," he said. "Next time you'll do as I say." Stepping to his canoe, he returned with a waterproof sealskin bag which he opened and set beside him upon a flat rock. Selecting a clean cloth, he wet it in the river and approached the breed, who drew back, muttering surlily. Brian smiled. "Must do. Fix all up. Hurt a little. Good medicine. After while no much sore." And when the man still protested he turned to Tom Shirts and the others. "Throw him on his back and hold him. Twist his head around so I can fix him up. No time to fool. Dirty rag much poison —maybe-so die." The breeds obeyed without question, four of them holding the man despite his furious struggles while Brian cleansed the wound. At the first prick of the needle, the man's struggles redoubled so that the combined effort of the four was insufficient to hold him still until Brian calmly knelt upon his throat, cutting off his wind until the ordeal was over. Liberal application of iodine and a neat bandage completed the operation and Brian turned to see the man who had denied having any liquor standing at his elbow holding three quart bottles in his hands. He extended the bottles. "Me—A'm nem Simon Peter LaRue. A'm ain' t'ink A'm lie to you no more. A'm ain' t'ink A'm like A'm git my head bus'."

Brian grinned as he smashed the bottles. "All right,

old-timer. We'll get along now. But you better tell your friend here to come clean with his whisky, too, or I'll split the other side of his head."

"She nem St. Chrysostom. She ain' dreenk no wheesky. Dat mak' um seek on de belly. She try dat 'bout t'ousan' tam, but ever' tam she git so seek lak she die. Dat bad luck she ain' never kin git droonk, but de wheesky she ain' kin stay inside."

"Tough luck," grinned Brian, "but you get to work and make tea, while the other boys stow the lines and chains and bend a couple of track lines on the scows. We'll drop down eight or ten miles below the rapids and camp."

The men responded with alacrity, even the surly St. Chrysostom lending a hand in coiling the heavy line. An hour later, with Brian's canoe aboard, the scows were hauled around the head of the island and pushed into the current, where they were soon in the grip of the eddy that carried them almost against the opposite bank. With four men in each scow at the huge twenty-foot oars, and one at the steering sweep, Brian stood in the bow of the foremost scow and directed the course through the intricate channel that threaded the rapid, by pointing, first this way, then that, with his light canoe paddle.

That evening, as the two sat at their supper a little apart from the others, the oil man's glance fixed itself upon the river. "A man's a damn' fool to try to bull his way through somethin' he don't know nothin' about. Look at this outfit now—runnin' like clockworks—an' I didn't have nothin' but trouble from the start."

Brian nodded. "A man should know the river before he tries to run scows down."

"But they all told me they did know the river."

"They've all been up and down the river—some of them a hundred times—but they don't know the river except in a general way. Not one of them has ever acted as a pilot. They're all right for loading and unloading and to work at the oars and the sweeps. They're not hard to handle if you know them. Patience—that's the main thing. Let them know you mean what you say—then don't say too much. You'll have no further trouble now. . . . Listen, they're singing."

Chapter III

THE NE'ER-DO-WELL

It was toward evening of the sixth day after leaving the island that Brian O'Neill personally superintended the tying up of the scows at the McKay landing. He turned toward his canoe, which had been unloaded upon the bank of the river, to find the oil man waiting beside the little craft. The man extended his hand a bit awkwardly. "Shake," he said, "you done a damn good job."

Brian took the proffered hand. "Oh, we got here all right. I'm glad you're satisfied."

"It ain't so much the gettin' here. I knowed you'd do that when I seen how you went to work gittin' off them men an' savin' that scow. An' I'm more 'n satisfied, as fer as that goes. But it's the way you done it. Showed me up to myself fer the fool I was—back there at the Landin'—thinkin' I knowed it all. I've be'n watchin' you pretty near every minute since you come paddlin' out to that island, an' there ain't be'n but damn few minutes that I ain't learnt somethin'—kind of salted somethin' down fer future use, as the feller says. I've knocked around considerable down in Oklahomy an' I reckon I know a man when I see one. What I'm a-gittin' at is this: if you'll stay along here with me you kin name your own wages."

"But I know nothing about oil."

"Oil—hell! Who figgered you did know anythin' about oil? I know all about oil—an' there ain't so much to know. You git it—or you don't git it. But I know the game from settin' up the derrick to cappin' the well, or pullin' the casin' out of a dry one. You know the river, you know the natives, an' near as I can figger, you know every damn thing that's worth knowin' about the country. My drillin' crew'll be comin' on in a week, an' I know that jest as soon as you pull out them damn breeds is fixin' to go to hell on me. I won't even git my scows onloaded. While I'm out prospectin' fer a likely set-up they'll set around an' swizzle tea."

"How long would you want me?"

"Want you! I'll keep you all summer an' take you back to Oklahomy in the winter if you'll go. I'll take a chanct on you till I go broke—or make my million an' retire to watch the bangtails run."

"No," answered Brian. "I'm obliged to you, but I've got to be going."

"Goin'! Goin' where? There ain't no one goin' to pay you more wages than what I will."

"It isn't a question of wages. I'm not going to work for wages. I don't know where I am going. But I've got enough to outfit me for the summer and I'm going some place I've never been before."

"Prospectin'?"

"Well, not exactly. Just drifting along—exploring—seeing country that other people don't see. I only work long enough to get an outfit.

The other grinned. "Sort of a hobo, eh?"

"Yes," laughed Brian. "A hobo of the outlands."

"Well, you better forgit it. It ain't gittin' you nothin'. Tell you what I'll do—I'll gamble with you. You throw

in with me an' we'll go pardners. I've got the leases an' rig an' the savvy on the oil end. You've got nothin' but what's in under your hat. It means we work like hell an' if we win we're settin' pretty—if we lose, we're broke."

Brian shook his head. "No, I couldn't settle down in one place. I want the excitement of——"

"Excitement! Godalmity! Reckon you'd find excitement enough not knowin' whether you was goin' to spend next winter in the poorhouse or on Broadway. You might make a million—or you might go broke."

Brian smiled. "There wouldn't be any excitement for me in that. I wouldn't know what to do with a million if I had it—and I've been broke so many times that it isn't even a hardship."

"What do you know about that! Well, I'll be damned! 'Course, if that's the way you look at it the oil game ain't fer you. Sorry—damned if I ain't. Don't know when I've took to a feller like I done to you. Well, so-long—an' good luck. I've got to line up these here majesties an' see if they'll onload my scows to-morrow. I'll remember what you said about patience an' prob'ly their mothers'll see about half of 'em in the fall. Look me up if I'm here when you drift back this way—or if I ain't I'll be somewheres down in Oklahomy, or Californy, or Texas. Wherever the stink of new oil begins to spread over the map you'll be pretty apt to find John B. Sween—that's me. Anyone that ever seen an oil field knows John B. Sween. I've had my ups, when I flew higher'n a kite—an' my downs, when it looks like the hole I was in didn't have no bottom. Excitement—don't talk to me! I've et in Rector's, an' I've fought with the flies fer a free lunch that had ought to be'n swill!"

Brian laughed. "I'd rather take mine in the back

country," he said. "If a man has his rifle and his net he can eat just as well when he's broke as when he isn't. Good-bye." And as he pushed out into the dusk of the broad river he looked back to see John B. Sween still standing on the bank waving his hat.

Brian O'Neill lay sprawled on a flat rock studying the map that lay spread out before him. From time to time he made light pencil marks on the map. From time to time his gaze would wander to the buildings of Fort Chipewyan or out across the lake in silent contemplation of the ever changing mirage. A shadow fell across the map and he looked up into the smiling eyes of the pleasant-faced, grizzled man who had paused beside him.

"Ever been in that country?" asked the man, squatting beside the lad and laying his forefinger upon the map at a point to the northward of Lake Athabaska, where Brian had drawn a thin line with his pencil.

"No. That's why I'm going there now."

The twinkling gray eyes regarded the lad more closely. "You're going there—alone?"

"Yes."

"May I ask what for?"

"Why, just to have a look at the country. Maybe I'll cross the height of land and drift north."

The older man smiled. "I'm afraid you won't find the map of much service."

"I know I won't. None of 'em are—except right along the big rivers and the shores of the lakes. That's why I want to see the country for myself. Take all these lakes and rivers that are dotted in—they may be there, and they may not. If they are there, it's certain they're not

like the map shows them. I've checked up on it too many times."

The man nodded gravely. "That's true," he said. "The country's big and we've got to do the best we can. Much of the interior is sketched in on conjecture, or the hearsay of Indians. For instance, here"—he indicated a point only a short distance to the northward of Black Bay—"we have reason to believe, lies a lake of considerable size. We even have the name—Tazin Lake—but we haven't got the lake—yet."

Brian regarded the man with interest. "Who are you?" he asked.

"Adams is my name—Seth Adams. I am at the moment chief of the Geological Survey of Canada. Part of my job is the making of maps. Do you live here—at Chipewyan?"

"No. I was born at Fort Norman when my father was factor there. I live anywhere, from the Landing to McPherson." A battle royal broke loose close by among a rabble of lean, fly-tortured husky dogs, and when Brian's attention returned to his map the man was strolling leisurely in the direction of the Company buildings, pausing now and again to pick up a rock fragment, which he would examine and toss to the ground. "Making maps," muttered Brian to himself, as his eyes followed the tall figure. "That's a real job. And geological—that means rocks and the lay of the land."

In the trading room Seth Adams accosted Leith, the factor. "There's a lad out here poring over a map. Says he's going to take a trip somewhere north of the lake. Says he's the son of a former factor at Fort Norman. Know anything about him?"

The big Scot puffed at his pipe and combed his red

beard with his fingers. "Aye. He's Brian O'Neill, oldest son of old Kelly O'Neill, as fine a mon as ever stood in shoe leather. 'Tis a pity he should hae such a son."

"What's the matter with him—dissipated?"

"Nae, nae! The lad's clean as a dog's tooth. An' honest as the day. Smart, too—an' more's the pity. But he's a ne'er-do-weel—spends his time roamin' aboot the country instead of settlin' doon to work as any lad should. Wi' my own ears I heard McMurtchie offer him a post to run, but he wadna take it. Losh! I was thirty-three when they gi' me a post to run—an' the lad's nae yet turned twenty!"

Adams smiled ."How does he manage to finance these trips of his?"

"His gun an' his nets do most o' the financin'. The lad can live in a country that wad starve a wolf. But now an' so often, when in need o' supplies, he'll work for a spell at some post, or on the river. But he calculates his need to the penny an' when he has enough earnt he quits, whether or nae. Ye canna call him lazy, for when he works he's worth any two men I know, or a half a dozen breeds—an' the country he roams ain't a lazy mon's country, as well ye'll know. He knows everyone, white an' native, the length o' the rivers—an' everyone likes him."

"I wonder if I could persuade him to accompany me downriver? I'm arranging to bring in a survey party and if possible I'd rather use natives for ax men, chain men, and packers. Someone that knows the country and the natives as he does would be of great value to me."

"W-e-e-l," said Leith doubtfully, "ye might ask him. If he's in need o' an' outfit he might be glad o' the job.

If he ain't he'll nae work if ye offer him ten times his worth."

"I might put it up to him on the grounds that it would be a great accommodation to me."

"'Twad do ye nae gude. No matter how much work's to be done, or how few to do it, he'll work only as his own necessity requires. But mind ye—if ye really needed help, if ye was sick, or hurt, or in danger, there'd be nae end to the work he'd do or the time he'd put in to see ye through. Here he comes. If he's needin' supplies he'll be askin' me for a job. He never asks debt."

Brian entered the trading room and proceeded directly to the counter, upon which he laid a pencilled memorandum. He greeted the factor with a smile, "How are you, Mr. Leith? Can I help you put this stuff up? I'd like to get started as soon as I can."

The old factor raised his eyes from the slip of paper. "Wheer ye headin', lad?"

"Over north of the lake somewhere. Figure I'll cross the height of land and drift down some river and find out where I'll come out."

"Meester Adams an' I've be'n speakin' aboot ye. He's chief o' the Government Geological Survey. He's bringin' a party in later fer explorin' an' mappin' the country, an' whatnot. Right noo he's on his way doonriver to gather a crew o' natives fer packers an' the like, an' he was wonderin' wad ye like to go wi' him, bein' as I told him ye knew every mon, woman, an' child along the rivers."

Brian shook his head. "No, I'm going over north of the lake. It's a place I've never been."

"Losh, lad!" cried the Scot with a show of impatience, "ye can go north o' the lake any time! An' what

gude will it do ye when ye go there? Look at yer father, Kelly O'Neill, retired on the Company's pension an' livin' like a king, instead of which ye must be wastin' yer life roamin' aboot the country hither an' yon like a lost soul. Be a gude lad, the noo, an' go doonriver wi' Meester Adams. 'Twad be an' accom'dation to him, the wages is gude, an' the when ye come back I can use ye the rest o' the summer, what wi' the fishin' an' all."

Brian laughed. "I could have a post of my own if I wanted to stay on the rivers," he reminded. "And only a few days ago I was offered a half interest in an oil well. Let 'em keep their posts and their oil wells. Maybe, sometime, when I've seen all there is to see, I'll settle down—but not now."

Seth Adams was smiling. "I think I understand, my boy. I think you're right and in no immediate danger of settling down. However, if at any time you feel that you would like to join my party I shall be very glad to have you. I think there are things of interest to you that I could teach you, and I know that from you I could learn many things. In the meantime, if you should happen onto Tazin Lake I wish you'd sketch in its general shape and location. I would consider it a favour, for I feel sure we will meet again."

Adams was quick to note the gleam of mingled surprise and eagerness that leaped into the boy's eyes at his words—surprise at the openly expressed approval and eagerness to be at the exploration of the unknown lake.

Brian answered without hesitation: "Sure, we'll meet again. And your lake—if I don't find it, it won't be there. I marked the place on the map where you said it ought to be and I'll draw it in the best I can, and

later on, if you're anywhere in the country I'll find you." He turned abruptly on the factor. "Come on, Mr. Leith—let's get at these supplies. I must be going."

As the two watched the canoe put out from the landing the old Scot grumbled his disapproval as he combed at his red beard with his fingers. "A rollin' stone he is, that'll gather nae moss. When I was his age I'd be'n workin' near two year fer the Company, an' in eight year I'll hae my pension. An' what'll he hae when he's auld? He'll be lucky to live till he's auld—an' onlucky if he does, wi' naethin' to keep um. He's a ne'er-do-weel, an' a fair lesson to Kelly O'Neill fer sparin' the rod!"

Seth Adams laughed.

Chapter IV

SMOKE

Brian O'Neill leisurely skirted the north shore of Lake Athabaska. Headwinds delayed him for two days and he camped for three days with a small band of Wood Crees, set his nets, and smoked some fish. From the Indians he learned that there was a lake to the northward of Black Bay but that no river connected it with Lake Athabaska. It was a large lake, the Indians said, and it lay a day's journey to the northward of Black Bay. There was no portage trail but it was a good fishing lake. Sometimes a few Indians camped there to dry fish.

On Black Bay Brian cached his canoe and most of his outfit and struck northward on foot, skirting swamps and muskegs and following rock ridges stained red by the ochre of weathered pyrites. Time and again he paused to examine the rocks—gneiss, hematite, quartzite, and conglomerate. In the course of his wanderings he had crossed thousands of such ridges but never before had he given them more than a passing thought. To him rocks had been simply rocks. But now as he scrutinized the tilted strata, the sharp cleavage lines, the contrasting colouration, and the structural differentiation, he realized that here were things of which he knew absolutely nothing—things of profound importance to the North—his North. His thoughts leaped to

the kindly eyed Seth Adams with his smile of quiet understanding. He remembered that the man had stooped now and again to pick up and examine the rock fragments at Fort Chipewyan. He recollected that the man was chief of the Geological Survey of Canada. To him these rocks meant something; their structure, the very tilt of their strata could unfold the story of the mighty convulsions and upheavals of a cooling world crust, of grinding ice glaciers, and of the worth of the North to man.

With tea aboil over a tiny fire, he munched his smoked fish and bannocks, and stared from his ridge across the level top of a black spruce swamp toward a hill that loomed red in the purple distance. Then it was that realization of his own incompetence forced itself upon him. He, Brian O'Neill, who had prided himself upon his knowledge of the North, who was known upon the rivers as a good man in the North, knew almost nothing about the North! The thought first angered, then appalled him.

For a long time he sat and sipped his tea. And when he at last arose and swung the pack to his shoulders he knew that never again would the old self-assurance be his. He knew so little—and there was so much to know. They were right—Old Kelly and the good Father Giroux—and he, in the arrogance of his youth, had been a fool. Well, there was time to learn. He would return to the river and hunt up Seth Adams. But first he would map the lake as he had promised. It was with new purpose, an almost fanatical eagerness, that he pushed northward.

Late in the afternoon he sighted the lake from the top of a high ridge. It was a large lake, its surface

dotted with islands. For a half hour he studied its contours through his glass. At length he found what he sought, a thin spiral of smoke rising above the scrub on a long rocky point.

From the Indians he bought a canoe and for ten days he paddled about the lake, exploring its shores and its islands. It was when he attempted to commit his findings to paper that his incompetence was again forced upon him. Try as he would, he realized that at best his rude sketches were woefully out of proportion, that his very location of the lake might well be many miles from its true position. He knew that with instruments and certain observations of the sun or the stars men could determine their position to a nicety—and he realized with a curious blending of shame and anger that he did not even know the names of the instruments, much less anything of their use, or of the mathematical calculations required for the working out of the position. Well, he had done all that he could do. He had found the lake and, after a clumsy fashion, he had sketched it. Now he would hunt up Seth Adams. He hoped that Adams would not laugh at his effort but instinctively he knew that he would not. No man with eyes like that would stoop to ridicule.

Ascending a high rock on the western shore, near the source of a river that formed the lake's only outlet, Brian seated himself with his glass for a final survey of the country. It was one of those rare days of absolute stillness. The island-studded lake spread beneath him like a mirror of burnished sapphire, its unruffled surface depicting the image of each fleecy cloud with startling distinctness. Distorted by mirage, gulls alighting on the water a mile away looked like a fleet of huge

white canoes. A pair of loons feeding near by clove the surface in long rippling V's, disappearing now and then with an audible *plop*. At the shore line inverted rocks and spruce trees reached downward into illimitable depths.

Brian surveyed the scene dreamily. A frown creased his brow at the thought that to-morrow he would return to the rivers and hunt up Seth Adams. The wanderlust was strong upon him. His glance sought the point where the unknown river flowed smoothly into the Northwest. Where did it empty? Was it a smooth, deep-flowing stream? Or was its course broken by rapids and mighty falls? No river was shown on his map—not even a dotted one. Was it possible that he sat at the source of the vaguely indicated River du Rocher that emptied into South Bay of Great Slave Lake far to the northward? He knew that, more than anything in the world, he wanted to explore that river. And yet——

"Damn Seth Adams!" he exploded aloud. How was it that this quiet, kindly man, to whom he had spoken scarce a hundred words, had the power to change the whole tenor of his life? For he knew now that despite the urge within him he would not—at least until he had learned many things—follow the course of that river from source to mouth. Scornful he had been of the arguments, the upbraidings, and the cursings of factors and river men. Contemptuous of the offers of Company men and oil men. Deaf to the veiled hints of Kelly O'Neill and to the more direct suggestions of Father Giroux. He was his own man—free as the air he breathed—his course unordered as the course of a leaf in the wind. And now, for the first time in his life, as he sat staring down upon the surface of the un-

mapped lake, he realized the futility of that course. Always he had justified his wanderings in his own mind with the argument that he was learning the North. Rarely had he stooped to offer justification to others. Rather, he had flaunted in the face of disapproving factors his right to come and to go as he chose. With Kelly O'Neill and Father Giroux he had affected a tolerant scorn of book learning. Now into his life had stepped Seth Adams, who, in a few short moments and with words of approval rather than of censure, had unwittingly accomplished what all others had failed to accomplish. He had convinced Brian O'Neill of the utter futility of his aimless wanderings.

In Seth Adams Brian had instinctively recognized a kindred spirit—one who loved to roam the wilderness, even as he loved to roam the wilderness—but with this difference, that to Adams the wilderness unfolded the secrets of her rocks, and her lakes, and her rivers, and her forests; while to Brian it unfolded only the obvious and the superficial facts of terrain and of fauna—facts of little value to himself and of no value to others, as his laborious and clumsy attempt at cartography had demonstrated.

When Adams had explored a wilderness he would know, and posterity down through the ages would know, the nature and the names of its trees, and its soil, and its rocks—their significance and their portent. Its lakes and its rivers, its forests, its muskegs, its hills, and its barrens would be accurately recorded for the benefit of men to come. When he, Brian O'Neill, had explored a wilderness, he would know, so long as his memory served him, whether it was flat or hilly, barren or wooded, whether or not it contained game and fish

—and little more. Rage, shame, humiliation, contempt, surged up within him at the realization of his limitations. "And I'm the one they say knows the North!" he cried bitterly. "The fools! The damned fools! I know nothing! *But I will know!* If I live I'll know the North as no one else ever knew it! He said there were things he could teach me. He'll have his chance—and when he's through I'll learn more!"

A low muttering rumble sounded on the still air and far to the eastward huge thunderheads showed above the distant horizon like the snow-capped domes of rounded mountains. A loon laughed shrilly. The mirage effect intensified so that distant islands, their contours distorted, hung high and inverted above the blue mirror of the lake. Brian picked up his glass and, elbows on knees, subjected the scene to one last, long scrutiny. He turned the glass from the lake and endeavoured to trace the course of the river.

Suddenly his glass came to focus upon a spot far inland where above the spruce tops a thin haze of smoke blurred the vision. Now smoke, in the Indian country, is no thing to marvel at, unless it be the high-flung black banners of the fire fiend gone wild. To a man lost or starving a thin ribbon of smoke may mean salvation. Was it imagination or a trick of the glass that showed this illusive column to be trifurcate in form? Or in reality were three smokes rising and merging into a haze that showed dimly gray against the purple distance? Methodically Brian wiped his lenses and again trained them upon the distant haze. Yes—there were three distinct columns, but so close together as to be scarcely distinguishable. The trouble signal—the

S O S of the Northland—the one call that cannot be ignored.

Seth Adams was forgotten. Somewhere, doubtless upon the bank of the unmapped river, someone needed help. Probably an Indian—at any rate someone who was of the North, who knew the language of the wilderness. Thunder muttered louder than before, and Brian produced his compass and took his course. Glancing hastily about him, his eye fell upon a single gnarled spruce firmly rooted in a crevice at the very apex of his high rock. With his belt ax he hastily trimmed its branches into a lob-stick of unmistakable design— an unfailing back-sight from any ridge within range of his glass. Although reasonably certain that the smoke arose from some point on the bank of the river, he was taking no chances. Wind would precede the coming storm and whirl the smoke signal into invisibility at the tree tops, but with his compass course and his lob-stick he could go with unfailing accuracy to the point from which those three smokes were rising.

Ten minutes later his canoe slipped silently into the grip of the unknown river.

Chapter V

A WATERFALL—AND A GIRL

For the first two miles of its course the river held to the eastward, flowing swiftly but smoothly, skirting a long rock ridge. Brian had estimated the signal smokes to be not more than five or six miles from his starting point, and he realized now that unless the river changed its course soon he must leave it and strike north on foot. Then the river bent sharply to the northward through a narrow cañon that clove the ridge at a right angle to its course. Although he had been expecting just such a bend, Brian came upon it so suddenly that it was only by exercising all his skill with the paddle that he succeeded in beaching the canoe on a narrow strip of gravel at the very mouth of the cañon.

Ascending the ridge by a portage trail so dim and little used as to be almost indiscernible, he noted that the smokes rose from a point not more than two or three miles downriver. With his glass he studied the water ahead. For a few hundred yards it flowed between the perpendicular rock walls of the cañon with incredible speed but smoothly—like a river of oil. Once through the ridge it widened and rushed on into the distance in a foaming white-water rapid. Nearly a mile of white water was visible and Brian noted that the dim portage trail seemed to skirt the whole length of the rapid. He was in a quandary. Should he abandon

his canoe and proceed on foot? Suppose the smoke rose from the opposite side of the river and he should find himself with no means of crossing? Should he run the rapid in his frail bark canoe with the chance of swift disaster on any one of a thousand jagged rocks? How much white water lay beyond that distant bend? Suppose it ended in a fall?

A puff of cool wind fanned his face. Lightning flashed to the eastward and its thunder reëchoed in a threatening roar. The distant smoke twisted and writhed and disappeared as the wind struck it. The foot trail meant an hour, maybe two, of scrambling over rocks made slippery by the deluge that was about to come—the water trail a matter of minutes. Another flash of lightning, and before its thunder had ceased to reverberate Brian had pushed his canoe clear of the gravel and in the grip of the current was slipping through the cañon at express-train speed. A moment later he was in the rapid, eyes staring straight ahead, hands gripping his trailing paddle as the frail craft plunged and bucked, shot ahead, swerved to miss jagged death by inches. Storm clouds obscured the sun, lightning flashed in forks, in blazing zigzags, in long blue spitting chains. The roar and roll of the thunder was continuous and the rain, after a few big scattering drops, cut loose in blinding torrents. The view foreshortened to a few rods as Brian, tight lipped, every muscle alert, strove to pierce the curtain of blinding rain.

Another bend in the river, and as the canoe shot into another rock-ribbed cañon a sound was borne to Brian's ears—a steady, incessant roar that sounded between the louder crashes of the thunder—the roar of a waterfall! The roar of the fall and the crashing

reverberation of thunder between the parallel walls of the narrow cañon united in a mighty symphony of sound that caused the heart of Brian O'Neill to leap within him. A man's way to die—fighting the North! Accepting her challenge—fighting on her own terms—asking no odds! Fighting for the right to aid a human in distress. An Indian, no doubt—but what matter? Truly a man's death in a man's country! But he was not dead yet—he was still fighting.

The forefront of water dropped away. A line of white appeared—one dark spot where deeper water shot over the rim—a mighty twist of the paddle—sheer space beneath his keel—a strange sinking feeling, a terrible jarring crash—cold water—daylight again—the rain pounding his face—gravel beneath him, and two capable brown hands clutching one of his own, pulling, tugging, holding him against the grip of some monster that seemed to clutch the lower portion of his body in a grip of iron.

Only half conscious, Brian raised his eyes, and for immeasurable moments stared wide-eyed into the face of a girl! Vainly his brain groped for intelligence. Who was this being—this most beautiful woman he had ever seen? What damned thing gripped his lower body and sought to drag him from her grasp into the seething maelstrom at the foot of the falls? Had he in fact died and was this a titanic battle between the forces of some outer world for possession of his body? If so, he was all for the force on the shore!

His brain cleared, and through the driving rain he could see that the lips of the girl were tight-set as she strained every muscle in her body to maintain her grip on his wet hand, and that the heels of her moccasins

had grooved the gravel until her feet were already in the water. Even as he looked the water rose higher about her fawn-skin leggings, while the thing that dragged at his hips seemed to redouble its effort. Rousing himself, he reached with his free hand and grasped the exposed root of a stunted banksian that grew close to the water's edge. Throwing his whole strength into the pull, he felt the girl's grasp relax. The next instant she had leaped to her feet and stood over him while both hands gripped the collar of his heavy shirt. A few more heaves and he was clear of the water to his hips, while the thing that pulled at his legs seemed to have lost its power.

"Hold tight to the little tree and I will try to free you."

As the deep, rich voice sounded in Brian's ears the girl released her hold and stepped to the water's edge. Craning his neck, Brian saw her stoop and seize hold of the bow of his shattered canoe, which she succeeded in pulling partially clear of the water. The strain on his legs eased and Brian saw at a glance what had happened. Shooting over the twenty-foot fall, the canoe must have struck the water on an even keel with the result that he had crashed through the bottom to the hips, and the canoe in the grip of the rapidly revolving eddy had held him as in a vise. With the canoe partially ashore the danger from the river was past and it was but the work of a few moments to disentangle himself, with the aid of the girl, from the wreckage.

The rain had ceased as abruptly as it had started, and only the muttering of thunder to the westward marked the path of the passing storm. A single ray of sunlight, forcing its way through a rift in the wind-torn

clouds, struck aslant the waterfall, and Brian felt his heart race wildly as he stared almost in awe at the figure that stood sharply outlined against the rainbow mist—face still flushed from her exertions—hair falling in a cascade of jet upon her shoulders—rain-soaked garments clinging to the curves of her beautifully moulded body—red lips parted to reveal teeth that flashed like wet pearls. "Who are you," he asked, and his voice sounded harsh, almost brutal in its abruptness.

She turned toward him eagerly. Was it the rain or were the hazel eyes brimming with tears? "I am Annette Beauleau. But come. My father—see—he is over there!"

Brian's glance followed her pointing finger to a spot a few feet distant where a canoe lay overturned upon the gravel. A bit of blanket protruded from beneath the canoe. "Is he—hurt?" he asked as he followed the girl to the spot.

"Ah, yes, he is shot. And I am afraid he will die. It is very bad." There was no doubt now of the tears that coursed unchecked down the girl's cheeks. "I could not lift him into the canoe and when the storm came I sheltered him as best I could."

Together they lifted the light craft and for a moment both gazed in silence into the upturned face of the unconscious man—a face so white that Brian feared for a moment that he was dead. Dropping to his knees, he threw back the fold of blanket that covered the upper portion of the body and with his fingers ascertained a slight pulsation of the heart. Blood-reddened bandages hastily stripped from the girl's undergarments swathed his neck and shoulder and Brian saw that blood still

oozed from a wound beneath the armpit. Leaping to his feet, he dashed to his wrecked canoe, thanking his stars that he had not neglected to lash his pack to a thwart. From the sodden pack he procured a first-aid kit and a bottle of whisky, and with his knife he cut away the hastily placed and inefficient bandages. Three gaping wounds were exposed, their positions giving instant clue to the course of the bullet, which had entered a couple of inches below the armpit, ranged upward, smashing the clavicle, torn out, and entered again low in the throat, where it had evidently lodged. In some miraculous manner the bullet seemed to have missed the great arteries, although hemorrhage had occurred rather copiously from the wound beneath the armpit and from the throat wound, while there seemed to be no internal throat hemorrhage.

The girl watched breathlessly as Brian washed the wounds, plugged them, drenched them with iodine, and applied neat, workmanlike bandages. "Oh, you have saved his life!" she cried, tears coursing down her cheeks. "He would have bled to death with my poor bandages."

Brian shook his head gravely. "No—his life is not yet saved. Do not raise false hopes. The wound is very bad. He may not live. But at least we have done what we could—both of us. Without your bandages he would even now be dead."

"Oh, but you are a doctor! Surely you can save my father!"

"I am no doctor. Merely a—a hobo of the outlands. All my life, since I have been old enough, I have drifted here and yon as the spirit moved me. What little skill I may have in the dressing of wounds has

been picked up here and there as opportunity offered. But my knowledge goes no deeper. Where do you live? We must get him home."

The girl pointed downstream. "It is only about a half mile. Our cabin is on the bank of the river. My father started for Fort Chipewyan for supplies. I was at the cabin and I heard a shot, and thinking that he had killed a caribou I ran here as fast as I could so that I could cut out the meat and pack it back to the cabin where we have ice. For meat spoils very quickly in the heat of summer—but the ice keeps it fresh until we can smoke it. When I got here my father was lying beside the canoe and his shirt was soaked with blood. I do not know why he did it. He has never been so careless before. But it was very plain—what had happened. He stepped out of the canoe and drew the gun toward him by the barrel. The muzzle must have been almost against his side when in some manner it went off, for his shirt had started to burn before his blood put it out. Many times he has told me never to take hold of a gun by the barrel."

Brian examined the piece—a cheap single-shot trade rifle carrying a soft lead bullet. He nodded corroboration of the girl's deduction. "The hammer caught on a thwart or on the gunwale and was released before it came to full cock, but not until it had been drawn back far enough to fire the cartridge. We all make mistakes —and sometimes they are costly."

"Should we not give him a drink of the cognac?" asked the girl with a glance at the bottle that stood unopened upon the gravel.

Brian stooped and placed his fingers over the man's heart. "That isn't cognac, it's whisky. And I don't

like to give him any till we get him home and in bed, unless we have to. His heart seems a little stronger than it was and the whisky might revive him—wake him up. No matter how careful we are this moving him is going to be rough work, and if he stays unconscious he won't feel any pain."

"You know everything. You can do everything," said the girl simply. "I have not seen any man like you before. And I thank the good God that he sent you to me. You have saved my father's life."

Brian's heart leaped at the words, and at the look of reverence, almost of adulation, with which the deep hazel eyes were regarding him. Never had he imagined a woman so beautiful. His brain groped for words and when he spoke his voice sounded gruff to his own ears.

"I know almost nothing. And there are few things I can do. It was you, yourself, called to me—with the smoke of your little fires." He paused and pointed to the three piles of ashes and blackened, rain-drenched sticks. "Only, next time, place your fires farther apart. It was only by chance, because the air was very still, and because I have a very good glass that I was able to read your signal. It looked like a single column of smoke —the smoke of an ordinary campfire. I saw it from a high rock on the shore of the lake."

"And you came as fast as you could! But did you not know of the rapids and the falls?"

Brian smiled. "The rapids, yes. I stopped and looked them over from the high ridge at the first cañon. I could see about a mile of white water. But I have run white water before and the foot trail looked long and rough. One does not delay in answering a call for help. A few minutes lost and the help may come too late. Of

the falls I knew nothing. This river is not upon the maps."

The girl stepped directly before him and he saw that her cheeks were deeply flushed. "When you say there are few things you can do, you do not speak the truth. No other man, seeing those rapids, would have dared to run them! Even if there had been no storm—and such a storm. As I lay there beside the canoe I could scarcely see the falls, so furiously was the rain coming down. And then, with a terrible flash of blue lightning behind you, and a crash of thunder that seemed to shake the earth, I saw you just beyond the rim of the falls. I saw your quick work with the paddle and I saw the canoe swerve straight for the only spot in the whole river where it could have passed without being torn to pieces—and then it shot straight out, clear of the falls, and without overturning crashed to the surface of the pool! It was wonderful—terrible! In all my life I will never see a thing like it! No other could have done it—no other has ever done it. My father and I —we have buried six over there—Indians who have been caught at times in the suck of the rapids. We have found their bodies floating round and round in the whirlpool, and sometimes they are battered until they do not look like men. All my life I have lived in canoes, and I know no other could do it."

"Even so," answered Brian gravely, "I owe my life to you. For if it had not been for you I, too, would have drowned in the whirlpool."

"I ran as fast as I could. Almost at the moment your canoe hit the water I was there, and it is that the good God gave me strength, for I reached your hand as the whirlpool carried you close to the bank. But we would

have both been drowned if you had not come to and held to the tree root."

"You could have let go," suggested Brian, and on the instant was sorry he had spoken.

Quick anger flashed into the girl's eyes as she answered. "One could not let go while there was life. I knew that it was to help me you had come."

Impulsively Brian reached and took one of the brown, capable hands in his own. "No, Annette—*you* could not let go. Forgive me. I think we understand each other now."

"But—you have not told me your name."

"My name is Brian O'Neill."

Chapter VI

AT THE CABIN

Jovin Beauleau was a large man and the task of placing his unconscious form in the canoe without reopening his wounds was a difficult one. When this was accomplished, his head and shoulders braced and pillowed upon the two packs, the girl spoke. "You run the canoe down and I will take the footpath. There is no bad water and you will see our cabin on the left bank. I will be there almost as soon as you are."

Arriving at the landing, Brian beached the canoe and rigged up a litter out of two poles and a blanket, and the old man was removed to the cabin which stood in a grove of banksians on a bluff well above the river. When he had been placed in his bunk they fed him whisky diluted with hot water, and after he had strangled slightly they were rewarded by seeing the eyelids flutter and finally open, while the keen, hawklike eyes shifted in evident bewilderment from the face of Brian to that of the girl, then about the walls of the room. As the old man's brain oriented itself, a touch of colour tinged the white cheeks above the carefully cropped beard and he essayed speech, but the effort produced only inarticulate sounds and was attended by such evident pain that Annette leaned over him. "There, Father, do not try to talk yet. You will be better soon."

The gray head shook a feeble negative and his fingers fumbled at his bandaged throat as the keen old eyes fixed interrogatively upon the face of the younger man who stood at the foot of the bunk.

"That is Brian O'Neill. Do you remember, Father, you met with an accident? You shot yourself at the foot of the falls? And I found you and bound you up the best I could. But I could not move you alone. I did not know what to do so I prayed to the good God and built three fires, hoping that some Indian would see my smoke. Then the storm came, and the rain, and put out my fires, and I covered you with the canoe. Then he came, Father! Out of the thunder and the lightning he came —down through the rapids, and *over the falls*!"

At the words the old man struggled feebly as though to raise his head for a better view of the man who had done this thing, and again the unintelligible sounds issued from his lips.

Brian smiled. "It was nothing. I saw the smoke from the lake and knew that someone needed help. Not knowing of the falls, I did not fear the rapids. Even so, if it had not been for Annette I should not be here now. When my canoe struck the water below the falls I crashed through its bottom and it gripped me by the thighs so that I could not swim. Annette dragged me from the whirlpool or I should have been pounded to pieces or drowned."

Beckoning with fingers that trembled slightly, the old man freed his other hand from beneath the blanket, and as Brian stepped to his side he grasped his hand and the hand of the girl and pressed them with all the strength he could muster, while the bright old eyes expressed more eloquently than a torrent of words

could have expressed his appreciation of deeds well done.

The girl continued her interrupted tale. "And he cut away my poor bandages, and washed your wounds, and put on medicine, and bound them up as any doctor would, so that the bleeding stopped. And we moved you here." Her eyes flashed to Brian's, as though challenging denial, as she added: "He can do everything!"

The gray head nodded slightly, the bearded lips smiled, and the eyelids fluttered wearily and closed. The girl held a spoonful of whisky to his lips, but he turned his head away, and a few moments later he was asleep, breathing regularly but feebly. Together the two tiptoed from the room.

On the river bank the girl helped Brian to spread his blankets and the contents of his pack to dry. When they had finished they seated themselves on a net box while Brian cleaned and oiled the two rifles.

Annette spoke, in evident embarrassment. "We—I am afraid we have very little in the house to eat. My father generally goes for supplies soon after the ice goes out. And again with the dogs in the winter. But this year he kept putting it off. I think he is expecting a letter and wanted to be sure it would have reached Chipewyan. We have never got a letter but last winter he wrote one and I think he is expecting an answer. So the flour is almost gone, and the salt pork, and the tea, and the sugar. We have some smoked bear meat, and the nets will supply us with fish. But of the other things we have only a little."

Brian smiled. "It isn't the grub that's worrying me. We could live for a long time on the nets and the rifle

if we had to—but we don't. I have enough cached on Black Bay to last until—until your father gets well —or—or——" He was floundering miserably, and the girl came to his assistance.

"Or until he dies?" The deep hazel eyes looked questioningly into the eyes of the man and it was evident that she was steeling herself for his answer. "Tell me truly—do you think my father will die?"

Only for an instant did Brian hesitate. "Listen, Annette. I am not a doctor. I wish to God I were. I know nothing of medicine, or of surgery—some day I will know more. I cannot say whether your father will live or die. What is to be done, we two must do. There is no doctor at Chipewyan—none nearer than Fort McMurray, and maybe none there. By the time we could get a doctor the need for one would have passed —your father would either have recovered from his wounds or he would be dead. We will do the best we can —no one can do more. I am going to tell you truly, as you asked me to—I do not think your father can recover from his wounds. That bullet, misshapen from its contact with his collar bone, is lodged in his throat and is probably pressing on some nerve or artery, or maybe both. It should be removed. I am not a surgeon. Your judgment is as good as mine. I suggest that we watch him closely for a day or two and if it seems to us he is getting better we will leave things as they are until we can move him to a doctor. If he grows weaker, or fever sets in, he is doomed anyway. Then, if you say so, I will try to operate and remove the bullet. It is not a job to my liking. I would rather do anything else. But if we think it necessary, and you tell me to go

ahead, I'll try it. It may kill him but at least we will know that he would have died anyway. What do you think?"

"What can I think? I can but thank the good God that he sent me one who is both brave and wise."

Brian regarded her seriously. "When you know me better you will come to realize how little I know. I only realized it myself within the last few days. And now, each day, the realization is strengthening. My father, Kelly O'Neill, and Father Giroux have tried, each in their own way, to impress me with the value of an education. They both failed. I thought I knew it all. And then, by accident, I met a man who made me suddenly realize how little I do know. *But some day I will know!*"

"I should not like that man!" cried the girl. "He is a horrible man! Any man is horrible who tries to make out that he knows more than others. And especially to try to make out that he knows more than you. You should have given no heed to his words. You should have struck him in the face!"

Brian laughed. "No, no, Annette. He is not that kind of a man at all. When you know him you will like him."

"I will never like him! Could he have run the rapids and come over the falls?"

"I don't know," admitted Brian, amused at the girl's vehemence. "Going over the falls was more or less a matter of luck—the rapids, too, I suppose. But leaving the luck out of it, there is much more to be known than the running of rapids."

"It was not luck! All the luck in the world would not take a man safely through two miles of such rapids as those. And it was not luck that carried you safely over

the falls. I was watching and I saw you swerve the canoe at just the right moment to carry you over in safety. And if that man could not have come through as you did, anything else he might know would not matter—for he would be dead."

Brian was enjoying himself hugely. "Maybe, then, being wiser than I, he would have passed the rapids up and come down by the portage trail."

"Then he would have been a coward—which is the worst of all. If you had come down on foot my father would have died of the bleeding. No, I do not like that man, and always I shall hate him!"

Brian's smile broadened as certain words of old Kelly O'Neill's flashed into his brain. "Arguin' wid a woman, son, is amusin', but unprofitable—and the more ye argue, the longer it'll take ye to get back jist where ye started."

"What are you laughing at?" asked the girl, a trace of irritation in her tone.

"I was thinking of my father—that maybe he is a wiser man even than I realized."

Annette nodded seriously. "I can well believe that he is very wise. My father, too, is very wise—and very good." Hot tears welled into the hazel eyes and the rich voice faltered. "So good, and so patient, and so kind always to me, and to my mother."

"Your mother?"

For answer the girl pointed to a sodded mound at the edge of the bluff near the cabin. "She lies there. Three years ago in the winter she died, and in the spring, when the ground thawed, we buried her there overlooking the river where she used to love to sit and sew while my father would read to her from books. It was there, too,

that she taught me my lessons. And it is there that my father and I often sit and talk. We like to think that she is listening. Of course it is all make-believe, but it —somehow—it makes her seem nearer."

"I think I understand," said Brian gravely. "And maybe it is not all make-believe, after all. If I believed that our spirit or soul, or whatever it is, goes on living after death, I would much rather believe that it stayed near to those it loved most on earth than to believe that it stayed way off in some place they call heaven, or hell."

The girl regarded him quizzically. "Do you not believe that we go on living after death? Surely you do not believe that the grave is the end of all. Why, it would make our lives so—so futile—so like the lives of the beasts."

"I do not know what I believe. I have never given the matter much thought. Nor do I think that it makes any difference what I believe. My believing, or not believing, would not change the established order. I do believe that if we live decently, play the game, as they say, do the best we know how, help those in need of help, and do not injure others, that we will be amply rewarded in this world. If there is another state of existence beyond we will lose nothing by having played the game square."

"Do all wise men believe the same, I wonder? You talk much as my father talks. Only since my mother died he has joined me in my make-believe. But I think it is more out of respect for her belief than any belief of his own. My mother was a good Catholic and she instructed me in the belief of the church. And now that she is gone I think my father feels that it would be un-

fair to interfere with her teachings. He believes that, with an open mind, I can best judge for myself. He is like that, my father. Even though he is not a believer himself, he respects the belief of others, and for all religion he has a wide tolerance."

"And when you have said that about any man," said Brian, "you have paid him the highest compliment you could have paid."

"You will love my father—when you know him."

"I love him already, Annette. One could not help but love such a man."

"Ah, but you do not know the half—not the tenth—about my father. His has been a life of sadness, of bitter toil, and of disappointments. And all for the love of my mother—and of me. And never once had he faltered in that love, never once expressed regret for—what might have been." The girl ceased abruptly and leaped to her feet. "But here I am talking on and on—forgetting that you are hungry! You must forgive me! You are the first man except my father to whom I have ever talked—I mean, to whom I have really said the things that are in my heart to say. You are the first who would have understood. To the others one may talk of fish, and of dogs, and the making of snowshoes. I will build the fire now and cook supper, for, see, the shadows already grow long."

As she passed him to ascend the bank, Brian laid a restraining hand on her arm, and at the feel of the firm young flesh beneath his fingers the blood coursed madly through his veins. "You are different from other women. In my life I have not known many women, but had I known a thousand women, I would not have known one like you—and I am glad. Do not go to the cabin.

He is sleeping—and it is best that he be not disturbed. I have bannocks. They did not get wet because they were wrapped in the blankets. I have smoked fish, and my tea is water-tight. We will build our fire here and when we have eaten I will start back."

"Start back! What do you mean?" The genuine concern in the eyes of the girl brought a smile to Brian's lips.

"Back to the lake. There is a band of Indians camped on a point drying fish. It was from them I bought my canoe. I will get them to go to Black Bay and pack the stuff from my cache. I will have them pack it over the portage trail to the foot of the falls and we can meet them there. It is best that I should go now, while your father is resting easy. I can reach their camp by midnight if I can make the portage trail before dark. That will be the only hard job—packing the canoe over the portage. You say it is two miles?"

"Yes, two miles—but you do not pack the canoe. We keep another canoe cached at the head of the trail. It is under a bark shelter, behind a large rock, about as far as from here to the cabin east of the small strip of gravel."

"That makes it easy. It can't be more than two miles from the head of the portage to the lake, and not more than ten or twelve from there to the camp of the Indians. I can make the camp in six or seven hours and be back here an hour after daylight in the morning."

"But when will you sleep?"

Brian smiled at the evident anxiety in the girl's tone. "I am not tired and I will have plenty of time to sleep when I return."

Impulsively the girl laid her two hands on Brian's

shoulders. "I think you are wonderful!" she cried. "When I was so—so *alone*—so helpless that I was nearly crazy—I built my three fires with the forlorn hope that some passing Indian might see and realize their meaning. And I prayed to the good God. But the best I hoped for was that an Indian would help me take my father home. And then the storm put out my fires and hope died within me. It was the end! And then out of the storm you came! It was an answer to prayer, and a proof of the faith of my mother."

"You forget," said Brian cynically, "that it was the smoke, not the prayer, that I saw. But we will argue that later. Let us eat, so that I may make the lake before dark."

Chapter VII

A MAN'S JOB

BECAUSE the June twilight is long in the Northland, darkness had not yet fallen when Brian reached the point where the Indians had been camped. Rock rings, fish racks, a rotten fish net torn beyond possibility of redemption marked the deserted camp site. Seating himself upon a rock, he produced his glass, and with infinite care swept the visible shore line. No flicker of fire rewarded his scrutiny and he returned the glass to its case.

The Indians had gone—so be it. Then he himself must pack the supplies from Black Bay. He had once covered in less than a day the ground which the Indians of Lake Athabaska had told him was a day's journey. He could do it again. He had told Annette he would be back in the morning an hour after daylight. What would she think? That he had failed her? A frown, half perplexity, half anger, clouded his brow. Here was he, Brian O'Neill, with a thing to do, plain and unmistakable, and he was hesitating to do it because of what a girl might think! He, who with splendid disregard had flaunted his comings and his goings in the face of the whole North, was hesitating to do the obvious thing because of his promise to a girl he had known but a dozen hours.

He shook himself, as though to rid his shoulders of

a burden. Jovin Beauleau was to be considered—not the girl. Let her think what she would. She would know, in the end, that he had acted for the best. If he started at once he could still travel for an hour, and even with a heavy pack could be back at the cabin by dark tomorrow. Jovin Beauleau might die in the meantime—but if he should die, he would have died anyway. There was nothing to lose and in case of a long recovery, it was necessary that the three should eat.

Stepping to the canoe, Brian pulled it clear of the water and shouldered his packsack, which contained one damp blanket. When it became too dark to travel he camped on the summit of a rock ridge and at daylight he again pushed southward, refreshed by three hours of sleep.

From his cache he took flour, salt pork, and sugar, made up an eighty-pound pack, and struck out on the back trail. The day was oppressively hot. Black flies and mosquitoes assailed him in torturing swarms. The heavy pack galled and chafed his shoulders beneath his sweat-drenched shirt. The absence of any trail necessitated his picking his way along rough ridges whose surfaces were littered with jagged rock fragments and overgrown vines and bushes; crawling, climbing, smashing among the prostrate trunks of an old brûlée, and wallowing knee deep in the muck of swamps.

At noon he rested for an hour, devoured smoked fish, and guzzled strong black tea. Smoke from his smudge stung his eyes. His muscles ached, and his galled shoulders smarted like fresh scalds. Twenty-four hours ago, he reflected, he had lolled comfortably on the big rock and watched the approaching storm and laid his plans for the future. Much had happened since his glass had

picked up that smoke signal. He had missed death by a hair. He had made it possible for old Jovin Beauleau to recover; or to die comfortably in his bed, instead of miserably on the gravel at the foot of the falls. And he had met Annette! At the thought of the girl—the wild, dark beauty of her, her courage, the glimpse he had had of her soul—there stirred within him depths that had remained unsuspected and unplumbed.

Questions crowded his brain. Why had his heart leaped at the touch of her hand? Why did he want more than anything in the world to be back with her now? To rest his aching muscles? To be rid of his galling pack? To stand by to aid old Jovin in case he took a turn for the worse? Brian knew that it was none of these things. Was this, then, the thing that men called love? He knew nothing of love; but he did know that never before had he desired to be with any woman merely that he might sit by her side, and talk with her, and feel the touch of her hand. He knew a few women—the wives and the daughters of factors and river men—but to these he had never given a passing thought. He had not avoided them; neither had he sought their company. They were women, and he was a man, and therefore his interests differed from theirs. He knew that it was a common thing for a man and a woman to marry and live together and have children. He understood the biological process but had considered it merely as a biological process necessary for the continuance of the race. That was all well enough for factors and for men who were content to live their lives in one place. The women cooked, and washed the clothes, and looked after the children, and many of them kept the houses clean. They worked hard—harder, even, than the men. But they

hampered a man—tied him down. He had often promised himself that he would never marry. Women and children were immobile and he must be free to come and to go as he pleased. But Annette, now—she was different. Just to be near her—to know that she was near him was a pleasure in itself. She had told him she had spent her life in canoes. She would not hamper his movements. In fact, two could travel the wilderness more easily and more comfortably than one. And at meals, and in the evening when the work of the trail was done, they could talk. That was much better than sitting and thinking, or talking to one's self.

He found himself wondering what would become of Annette in the event of Jovin's death. Who was Jovin Beauleau, anyway? Why was he living far in the outland upon an unmapped river that flowed out of an unmapped lake into God knows where? How did he live? He did not look like a trapper, and certainly there was no fur in the light pack he was taking to Chipewyan. Surely there must be relatives—someone, maybe in some city or town of the provinces, to whom she could go if her father died. Suddenly he realized that he felt strangely alone. The thought angered him. He, Brian O'Neill, was lonely in the heart of his wilderness! And all because a girl he had known less than twenty-four hours was going out of that wilderness. She should not go out! And yet there was Seth Adams, and the education he had determined to get. Brian frowned deeply as he snugged his pack. Instead of being roving, carefree, life had suddenly become a complex thing—a thing of weighty decisions and of problems to be worked to solution.

He extinguished his fire and shouldered his pack. At

least, one need not cross a bridge till one got to it. His job was to pack in the supplies. Time to think of the future when Jovin Beauleau got well, or died. He found himself hoping that the wound would be slow to kill, or that the old man's recovery would be prolonged.

Despite the heat, his aching muscles, and his galling pack, Brian forced the trail. He must reach the cabin by dark or Annette would worry. The thought thrilled him strangely—that Annette should worry for his safety. "Annette Beauleau"—he repeated the name aloud, rolling it upon his tongue. A beautiful name—a French name, evidently. Strange that he had never cared for the French—a fine people. . . . Annette . . . Annette Beauleau . . . Annette O'Neill . . .

On and on he toiled over rocks and across muskeg. The shadows were long as he staggered out onto the shore of the lake at the point where he had cached his canoe. With muscles trembling from strain, he slipped from under the pack that for miles and miles had seemed to press him to the ground so that he could scarcely place one foot before the other. Times innumerable he had fallen, only to struggle to his feet and stumble on, and now the gruelling grind was over —a man's job—nearly fifty miles, the half of them under an eighty-pound pack, and no trail! For long minutes he lay on the gravel in a delicious half stupor of exhaustion. Then, summoning his strength, he stripped off his clothing and plunged into the lake. The cold water instantly revived him, giving life to jaded muscles and soothing tortured skin. A stiff breeze from the south had arisen and Brian smiled as he dressed himself. Cutting three light poles, he rigged his blanket as a sail, stowed the pack so as to brace his mast, and

pushed out into the lake, heading for the mouth of the river, directly down wind.

The two miles of the portage trail were as nothing when in the gathering darkness he hurried along with scarce a thought for the galling pack. Starlit dark found him once more upon the river, and as he rounded the bend to the cabin a bright little fire welcomed him from the bank. As the canoe beached the girl stepped from the shadows.

"Did you think I had deserted you?" smiled Brian.

"Oh, no, I knew that you would come. Three times to-day, while my father slept, I walked up to the falls. Then, when it began to grow dark, I built the little fire so that you would know that I was watching for you —that I would not sleep while you worked. And now our supper is ready. We can eat it here so we will not disturb my father—he is sleeping again. See, here is the tea, and some bread I made to-day, and the smoked bear meat."

"Haven't you had your supper?"

"No, I waited for you."

Once again the strange new thrill welled up within him, and it was with an effort that Brian refrained from reaching out and drawing the girl close against his pounding heart. "How is he?" he asked with a jerk of the thumb toward the cabin.

"He slept well during the night but to-day he seems to be growing more restless. He sleeps a short time and then he wakes up and makes sounds. But he cannot speak words. I have fed him only a very little of the broth I made. It seems to strangle him. I am afraid he has a fever, for he feels hot, and his eyes are very bright, and at times a strange look comes into them,

as though he is seeing things that are not there. He has been trying to tell me something, I think, but when I gave him a pencil and paper he could not write—only make scratches and marks that do not mean anything. At last he gave it up. After we have eaten I wish you would look at him."

"Sure I will, Annette. And maybe we had better sit up with him, by turns."

"I will sit beside him," cried the girl. "You must be very tired. Is it that you had trouble in finding the Indians?"

"I couldn't find them. I think they have left the lake. I went for the grub myself."

Annette rose without a word and, walking to the canoe, lifted the heavy pack. It took all her strength and she set it heavily upon the gravel. Then she turned and stared incredulously into his face. "You have been to Black Bay—to the big lake—and back since you left here—and carried that!" she cried.

Brian laughed. "Yes. We needed the grub, and there was no other way to get it."

"I could believe it of no other man," she said simply, "for no other man could have done it—no other man would have done it, if he could. And now you talk of sitting up half the night with my father! I have thanked the good God, and I have prayed to Him for your safety. To-night I shall thank Him again for sending the best man in the world to help me in the time of my trouble."

"No, no, Annette! There are plenty of men who could have done it, and who would have been glad to do it. And I am not tired now. I got a good rest crossing the lake. The wind was right and I sailed."

The girl filled the plates from a pot placed close

beside the fire. She poured the tea and threw on some wood, and as Brian turned to draw the empty net box into the light for a table she gave a low cry and dropped to her knees by his side. "You are hurt! Your shirt is all bloody!"

"No, it is nothing. I did not figure on doing any packing, so I wore but a single cotton shirt. The pack straps galled me a little, that's all."

Before he realized she was gone the girl was halfway up the bank. She returned in a few moments with a bottle. "Take off your shirt," she said, "and I will rub this pain killer on your hurts."

"Sit down and eat your supper," answered Brian, his mouth full of bear meat. "Don't mind——"

"Take off that shirt this minute!" she cried, stamping her foot. "Sometimes you make me very angry! You are good to everyone but yourself! You need someone to look after you! It is a wonder one so foolish could live! Take off your shirt, or I will tear it off with my hands!" Brian stared open-mouthed at the girl as she delivered her tirade. Half-bewildered at the vehemence of her attack he found himself obeying as a matter of course.

As the garment slipped from his shoulders she uttered a gasp, and he saw that her eyes were filled with tears. "Oh, it is terrible!" she cried. "It is as though you had been skinned with a knife! Turn your back to the light, so that I can see. This will hurt you—but it will make you well. Oh, why did you not tell me?" Very gently she was applying the liniment, and Brian grinned as it bit into the raw flesh. When she had finished she tossed the empty bottle aside, and as Brian reached for his shirt she jerked it from his hand.

"You cannot put that shirt on. It is stiff with blood and sweat. I will bring you a clean one and to-morrow I will wash that. When your things got dry I carried them into the house and I sewed some things that were torn and sewed on some buttons."

Once more she sped up the bank and returned with a clean shirt which she eased onto his smarting shoulders—but Brian gave no thought to the pain. He was conscious only of a strange feeling of well-being—of comfort. Annette, the most beautiful woman in all the world, had cared for his things—had sewed them —and to-morrow she would wash his shirt!

The meal was concluded in silence but more than once Brian's fingers traced the course of a neat seam on his sleeve where he remembered a ragged tear had been.

Chapter VIII

BRIAN TURNS SURGEON

In the cabin, by the light of a single candle, the two leaned over the bunk upon which Jovin Beauleau tossed restlessly and mouthed sounds that were not words. The eyes, fever-bright, that stared up at them from the pillow showed no glint of recognition but seemed to stare past them at the grotesque shadows that played upon the log walls as the candle flame wavered and flared in the light breeze that fanned the room. Brian laid his palm upon the brow and found it hot and dry to the touch. He held a spoonful of whisky and water to the lips that looked parched and drawn. The liquid was sucked greedily from the spoon but its swallowing was accompanied by such spasms of strangling that Brian laid the spoon aside and motioned to the girl, who followed him through the doorway. She blew out the candle, and as they stood there in the night with the pungent odour of the mosquito smudge in their nostrils Brian saw by the light of the glittering stars that her face was very white, and that the dark eyes that looked into his own were brimming with tears. He hesitated, his brain groping for words, when the girl forestalled him.

"He is worse," she said simply with forced calm.

"Yes, he is worse. He has a fever and I am afraid

he cannot swallow enough to keep life in his body. He might die of starvation if the fever does not take him first, unless——" He paused, and Annette stepped closer and laid her hand on his arm.

"Unless the bullet is removed from his throat?"

Brian nodded. "It is a chance in a thousand—maybe a chance in a million—and maybe no chance at all. I do not know. But I can't stand by and see a good man die without doing all I can to save him."

The capable brown fingers trembled upon his arm and Brian felt their grip tighten as she steeled herself for the decision. "Then, Brian, you will try—to take out the bullet?"

It was the first time her lips had framed his name and the sound thrilled him even more than the grip on his arm thrilled him. And in that moment he knew that for this woman he would attempt anything in the world. "Yes, Annette," he answered, "I will try. We can do nothing to-night. We have not light enough. To-morrow we will do our best. But you must understand that I know nothing whatever of surgery. The operation may kill him. I may cut into an artery that will cause him to bleed to death, or he may die from the shock. We have no anesthetic. It is a terrible decision that we are making, but he is growing worse so rapidly that he can only live a few days—maybe only a few hours. You are certain you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. I know it is a terrible thing I am asking you to do. But, believing as we both do that there is the barest chance to save his life, we must take that chance. Even if he should die under the knife, it would be better than to linger on for days and suffer as he is suffering—burning with fever, tortured with

thirst that cannot be satisfied, fighting a hopeless fight."

Brian took the brown hand in his own. "You are a brave girl, Annette. The most wonderful woman I have known." She stood close at his side, her eyes raised to his, her red lips parted slightly, and it seemed to Brian that at his words a slight flush tinged the pallor of her face. He knew that his own hand was trembling, and it seemed that the girl must hear the mighty pounding of his heart. Almost irresistible became the desire to draw her close against his breast, to kiss those lips so invitingly upturned, those eyes that seemed to glow with mysterious depths as they gazed softly into his own, to bury his face in the cool blackness of her hair. Then he turned abruptly away, and his voice sounded harsh and unnatural in his own ears. "Come—you must get some sleep. To-morrow will be a hard day, Annette—the hardest day you have ever lived."

She followed him into the house, and, lighting the candle, set it upon the table. Jovin lay quiet upon his bunk, and Annette stepped close and whispered into Brian's ear: "My bed is there," she said, pointing to a bunk built along the opposite end of the cabin. "You go to bed and I will sit by the side of my father. It is past midnight and you need sleep."

Brian's protest got no farther than its opening sentence. He noted the squaring of the shoulders and in the hazel eyes the glint of swift anger that had preceded her command to take off his shirt. Words seemed to fairly hiss from her lips. "Go to bed! Do not stand there talking! We have work to do to-morrow and you need the rest! Go now—or I shall be very angry! I will call you at daylight."

She turned her back upon him with an air of finality and, blowing out the candle, seated herself in the chair beside the injured man. Brian removed his pacs, threw himself down upon the other bunk, and in a few moments his heavy, regular breathing told the girl he was sleeping the sleep of utter body weariness.

The two men slept and the cheap little clock ticked monotonously upon its shelf as Annette sat staring into the dark, trying to envision what the coming day would bring forth, wondering vaguely of the future, conning the past. Now and again her head would drop forward and she would waken with a start, tense, listening, but there were no sounds save the regular breathing from her own bed, the shorter, panting breaths from the bunk beside her, and the illusive little night sounds that drifted in through the door.

Once her father stirred restlessly and uttered his unintelligible sounds, and she lighted the candle and fed him a spoonful of whisky and water. Fearing that his choking effort to swallow had awakened Brian, she crossed the room and in the yellow candle light stood looking down upon the slumbering form. "He looks just like a little boy," she breathed softly to herself. "And yet he is, oh, so much a man! He said I was the most wonderful woman he had known and in his eyes I could see it—that he—he loves me. Oh, why did he not hold me close to him and kiss me, and tell me of his love, as they do in the books—and as it was in his heart to do? In his eyes I could see his love, and I would have loved him forever if he had!" Swiftly, impulsively, she stooped and her red lips lightly brushed the bronzed cheek. The form stirred slightly and in a panic of confusion she blew out the candle and

fled to her chair, her stockinged feet making no sound upon the floor.

For minutes she sat in tense silence as her heartbeats kept time with the swiftly ticking clock. But the regular breathing continued and once more she drowsed in her chair and dreamed of a huge bird that came flying to her over the falls. Out of the storm the bird came and caught her up, and the woods and the river grew smaller and farther away, and then she saw that it was no bird at all but Brian O'Neill, and there was no storm any more, and no world—nothing—just they two together, drifting on—and on—and on.

She was awakened by a hand on her shoulder and the voice of Brian O'Neill in her ears. Daylight flooded the room and she stared up, bewildered, into the eyes that smiled down into her own. "Better turn in now and get a little real rest," he was saying.

"Oh," she cried with a glance of apprehension toward her father, "I—I must have fallen asleep!"

Brian nodded. "No harm done. He seems to be resting easy. And you were not really asleep—just dozing. Anyone would have done the same. You were dead tired. What you need is three or four hours of real sleep."

"I am all right now. I am wide awake."

There was no smile in the steel-blue eyes now, nor any glint of anger such as flashed into her own eyes when he had baulked at her orders—only a slight narrowing of the lids and a calm, level gaze that seemed, somehow, more terrible than the flash of anger. And the words that fell from his lips were uttered in a level, almost soft tone, but behind their velvet softness the girl sensed the inexorable hardness of chilled steel.

"Go to bed," he said. "I will call you when I need you." And very meekly, and without a word of protest, Annette walked to her bunk as Brian stepped out through the doorway.

A plunge in the cold waters of the river and a vigorous swinging of the arms did much to rid Brian's shoulders of their stiffness and ache, and aside from an uncomfortable smarting of the abraded skin he felt fit and fine as he drew on his clothing and seated himself upon the overturned net box to think.

At the end of a half hour he arose and ascended the bank, more than ever chagrined at his own incompetence. Peering in through the doorway, he saw that the old man still slept, his breath coming regularly but in short rapid gasps. A curtain of printed calico drawn across the room on a wire screened Annette's bed, and as Brian studied the details of the cabin he frowned at the dimness of the interior, lighted by its single little window and the open door. "Got to get him outside," he muttered, and turned away to explore a small pole outbuilding for tools. Selecting an ax, hammer, and nails, he walked to the banksian grove, where he soon completed a creditable operating table of poles. He padded its top with spruce boughs and over all threw one of his own blankets. Seating himself, he carefully honed and stropped his two razors; then he laid them aside and again explored the tool house, this time emerging with a half-dozen new files and a pair of rusty pliers. For two hours he filed at the pliers, narrowing and thinning their jaws. "That ought to grip the bullet if I can locate it," he muttered, examining his handiwork. "Now, a piece of wire

for a probe and I'm ready. Not much of an outfit—but it will have to do."

He glanced toward the cabin and saw that smoke was rising from the stovepipe. Picking up his razors and pliers, he stepped to the door to see Annette busy in the preparation of breakfast. He laid the instruments upon the table. "We will boil these," he said, and turned toward the curtained partition that had been drawn back against the wall. "And I've got to use a piece of your wire. There is no more about the place."

The girl nodded without speaking, her eyes fixed in fascination upon the razors and the newly filed pliers. Brian filed off a length of the wire, doubled it back on itself, twisted it into a blunt, stiff probe, and fitted the cut ends into a wooden handle. As he laid it on the table he noted that the girl's face was bloodless, her lips tight pressed, and that once more her gaze was fixed upon the little array of instruments. Gathering them up, he walked to the stove and dropped them into the pan in which the water was already coming to a boil. Then he stepped to the girl's side.

"Buck up, Annette," he said gently. "We are up against a thing we have got to see through. We must save your father's life if it is possible to save it. We mustn't lose our nerve."

"You will not lose your nerve," she said in a tone of quiet conviction.

"I hope not. But it is just as important that you do not either. I will need help."

Annette set the food on the table and breakfast was eaten in silence. With a cup of tea before him Brian sat balancing a fork on his finger. It was a three-tined

steel fork, and he stared at it idly. Annette, watching in tight-lipped silence, noticed that the balanced fork did not tremble. Suddenly she saw his eyes take on a gleam of interest. He stared fixedly at the fork for a moment, then crossed the room and came back with the file. It was the work of a few moments to file off the two outer tines. Retrieving the pliers from the boiling water, Brian opened the stove and held the single-tined fork in the fire till it reddened. Then with the pliers he bent it at a right angle near the point of the tine and tempered it in warm water.

"May need just such a hook to lift the bullet so we can get hold of it with the pliers," he explained, and returned both instruments to the pan.

"Where did you get the pliers?" asked the girl." Do you carry them with you?"

"No, I found them in the shed."

"But ours are not like that! They are old and rusty and much larger."

"Yes, they were too clumsy so I cut them down. Wore out three files doing it. But I think they'll work now " Brian drained his cup and passed it to be refilled.

"Better drink some more tea, Annette. Maybe a little of that whisky in it would help."

"Do you want whisky in yours?"

"No, I don't use it much—once in a while when I'm chilled, or very tired."

"I think I will not take any, either. I am not tired or chilled."

For a long time they sat in silence. Then their eyes met, and, catching the unspoken question in the girl's glance, Brian nodded slowly. "Yes, Annette, we will do what we have to do."

The girl glanced toward her father's bunk. "There is not much room, nor much light," she said.

"No, we will carry him outside. I built a table under the trees—plenty of room and plenty of light."

"You never forget anything! You are wonderful!" she exclaimed. Brian noticed that there was a catch in her voice and that she was very near to tears.

"I never knew enough to forget much," he answered lightly.

Jovin Beauleau lay as one dead. Even the ordeal of lifting him from his bunk to the litter laid alongside on the floor failed to rouse him. The two carried him to the grove and laid him upon the improvised operating table.

When all was in readiness Brian spoke to the girl. "Scrub your hands and then stand by to help," he said, and proceeded immediately to cut away the band from the old man's throat. Failing to locate the bullet by feeling with his finger tips, he picked up the probe and, inserting it in the mouth of the wound, pushed it gently inward and upward, following the supposed course of the bullet.

It seemed a long time as he slowly moved the probe about before its end came into contact with something hard. Very carefully he withdrew the probe, noting the angle and the depth of penetration. Working swiftly with the razor, Brian made a shallow incision and then deepened the wound, pausing to scrutinize it for the appearance of anything that looked like the walls of a vein or an artery or the larger tubes of the throat.

Finally the point of the razor blade struck a hard object. In the instant's inspection he got before blood again obscured his view he saw that his razor had missed

the wall of a large tube-like artery by scarce the thickness of a sheet of paper.

When Annette had blotted the incision he inserted the pliers closed, turned them at a right angle to the incision and opened them, thus spreading the incision at the bottom and pushing the large artery aside. Then with the hook he reached beneath the bullet and, working this way and that, finally succeeded in unseating it from its position. Inserting his thumb and forefinger, he withdrew it, washed it in the pan, and examined it carefully to see that it had not been split into pieces. Finding it intact, but misshapen from contact with the collar bone, he tossed it aside. Flushing the incision with a mixture of iodine and water, he closed it with three stitches, painted it and the wound liberally with iodine, and rebandaged the throat.

"Bring the whisky and water and a spoon," he ordered, and as Annette flew to the cabin, he worked swiftly in removing the babiche line and the bands of cloth that had held the injured man immovable.

When the girl returned Brian slipped his arm beneath the old man's head while Annette held a spoonful of the liquid to his lips. As it trickled into his throat a shudder shook the man's frame, the muscles of his throat worked, and he swallowed convulsively. Again and again the girl refilled the spoon, and each time the liquid was swallowed. A slight flush pinked the pallid cheek, the eyelids fluttered, and the keen old eyes glanced sanely from one face to the other. The lips moved, and as they framed her name Annette burst into a torrent of weeping. Throwing her arms about Brian's neck, she buried her face in his shoulder

and sobbed. "Oh, you have saved his life! He no longer strangles! And he can talk!"

In his confusion Brian could only pat her arm with his free hand while he endeavoured to hold the old man's head upon his other arm. "There, there, Annette. Listen! He is trying to tell you something."

The sobbing stopped as suddenly as it had begun and the girl inclined her head to catch the words: "Annette—little daughter—the gold—you must record it—a pencil—I grow weaker——"

"A pencil and paper—quick!" cried Brian, and as the girl sped toward the cabin he held a spoonful of whisky and water to the lips. Jovin Beauleau smiled into the eyes of the younger man. "You got—the bullet."

"Good God!" cried Brian. "You were—conscious?"

"The pain was great. My little girl—look after——" Annette arrived, breathless, and at sight of her, before Brian could prevent, Beauleau made a mighty effort to rise as he reached for the pencil and paper. The outstretched arm dropped to the blanket, the shoulder bandage suddenly crimsoned, and red blood gushed from its edges. Brian lowered the head, and with his hands tore at the bandage. As it came away, blood spurted from the shattered shoulder. Plugging the wound with one hand, he sought for the artery with the fingers of the other.

"A bandage—quick—Annette!" cried Brian, whose fingers had clamped upon the artery so that the flow of blood was almost checked. And when no bandage appeared he turned his head to see the girl, lying an inert heap upon the ground.

For minutes that seemed hours Brian stood pinching the artery, while with his other hand he tried in vain to detect a flutter of the heart. Realizing at length that Jovin Beauleau was dead, he released his hold. For a long time Brian stood gazing from the body of the old man to the still form of the girl on the ground. Hot tears filled his eyes and trickled down his cheeks as he realized how keen was his disappointment—for he, too, had believed that Jovin Beauleau would live after the successful removal of the bullet.

Washing his hands, he picked up the girl, carried her to the cabin, and laid her gently upon her bed, where he sponged her face with cold water and fed her whisky from a spoon. She came to quickly, coughing as the raw liquor burned her throat, and for long moments she lay in stunned silence, clutching in both of hers the hand of the man who sat upon the side of her bed. Finally she spoke, haltingly, afraid. "Is he—has he—gone?"

And Brian answered without meeting her eye: "Yes, Annette, he has gone." As she felt his strong fingers close tightly upon her own, tears came, and in the little room the sound of her muffled sobbing blended with the incessant ticking of the cheap little clock on its shelf.

Chapter IX

RECONSTRUCTION

For a long time Annette Beauleau lay, while her sobbing subsided into short catchy breaths. In vain she tried to think, but her overwrought brain refused to function beyond the simple realization that her father was dead. Jovin Beauleau—her constant companion, and since the death of her mother three years before her only companion—was gone. Her world had crashed. Her life, always so simple, so replete with the very joy of living, must change—must become some other kind of a life of which she did not know. In vain she tried to envision the future. Her contacts with people had been limited to wandering Indians, to an occasional trip to Fort Chipewyan—and to Brian O'Neill.

She could hear Brian now, moving about outside. She had scarcely noticed—was it minutes or hours ago that he had gently disengaged his hand from hers and had tiptoed across the floor, as though fearing to awaken her? The door to the tool house creaked noisily, there was a short interval of silence, and then—the ring of a pick on rocks, the rasping scrape of a shovel, and the thud of earth. There was something terrible in those sounds. Something ominously final. With clenched hands and tight-pressed lips the girl lay listening as inch by inch, foot by foot, Brian O'Neill drove the grave deeper and deeper into the stony ground. An hour passed—two hours. He would soon finish. Then

she and Brian would carry the body and lower it into the grave. And there would be two mounds on the bluff overlooking the river where her mother used to sit and sew in the long twilight while her father read to her from books and she herself played with the malamute puppies, or with the grotesque wooden doll that the old Indian had carved out for her years before. Dry eyed, she recalled those later days when only she and her father were left, and they would sit and talk while the shadows lengthened, and play their serious game of make-believe, pretending that the mother lying there was listening. Now only she was left—she and the grotesque doll. Slipping from the bed, she lifted the cover from a box and, reaching beneath her neatly piled clothing, withdrew the hideous puppet clothed in its dress of striped Yarmouth drugget. Hugging the doll to her breast, she threw herself on the bed where her sobbing broke out afresh as she pressed the ill-carved wooden face to her lips.

As the storm of weeping subsided she realized that the sounds from the outside had ceased. A shadow darkened the doorway, and hastily thrusting the doll beneath her pillow she dried her eyes and stood up to meet the steady gaze of Brian O'Neill. "Annette," he was saying, "I dug the grave. We will lay him beside your mother. I think he would have liked it so. And I believed that would be your wish, too."

"I knew you would do that," she answered simply, and bracing herself with a visible effort. "Shall we go now?"

He nodded and without a word turned and led the way to the banksian grove where they paused and stood, one on either side of the rude operating table whereon

the form of Jovin Beauleau lay covered with a blanket.

Removing his hat, Brian stood with downcast eyes fumbling its brim as Annette, stepping closer, raised the blanket and stood looking down into the dead face. Presently she stooped and, with an inarticulate choking sound, kissed the bloodless forehead. "Good-bye, my father," she faltered, "oh—oh—good-bye!" And then, resolutely, she covered the face and, stepping to the foot of the table, took her position at the poles.

Brian had rigged a sling, and when the body had been lowered gently an awkward silence ensued as the two stood looking down into the freshly made grave. Finally their eyes met and Brian spoke. "Is there—a book—prayers, or something, you would like to have read? I have heard Father Giroux read prayers—at—at times like this."

The girl shook her head. "No. When we buried my mother he read from the book of prayers because he thought she would have wanted it so. He did not believe as she did. But he was a good man to my mother —and always he was a good father to me."

"And no prayer ever written can add anything to that," said Brian in a tone of such whole-hearted conviction that the girl looked up in surprise.

"Why—yes—Brian, that is true, isn't it?"

"I think your father would rather have heard those words from your lips than all the prayers in all the books that were ever printed. I would rather leave such a monument in the heart of one I loved than have my name cut on a stone as tall as a mountain."

Tears welled into the girl's eyes; she opened her lips as if to speak, faltered, and, turning abruptly away, she entered the door of the cabin.

Brian filled the grave, mounded the earth over it with care and, walking to the river, threw himself on the gravel to think.

In the cabin Annette lay on her bunk and for a long time stared dry eyed at the ceiling. She tried to think, but her brain seemed numb, and presently the incessant ticking of the clock drew her eyes to its face and she leaped to her feet. Two o'clock! And they had eaten nothing since morning! She was surprised to find that she was very hungry. And Brian, who had done all the work? He must be nearly starved. She stepped to the door and looked out. A mound, raw and yellow in its ugly newness, appeared beside the grass-grown mound. Brian was not in sight, neither near the mound nor in the banksian grove. Sudden panic seized her. Had he gone and left her alone? No! And yet—why not? He would go sometime. And she would stay. This was her home—the only home she had ever known. There was no place to go. "He would not go without seeing me again. He could not. In his eyes I saw it. He—he will not leave me." She whispered the words, and as if in corroboration she glanced at his things, piled neatly where she had laid them, dried and mended. Walking to the edge of the bluff, she glanced downward and saw him stretched at full length on the gravel beside the river, his face buried in his arms.

Returning to the cabin, she lighted the fire and prepared dinner, and when it was ready she again stepped to the bluff and called. The meal was eaten almost in silence, and in silence Brian dried the dishes as she washed them. Then abruptly he spoke. "Let's go outside," he said, and when he led the way she followed to a spot of shade near the top of the bluff overlooking

the river. Throwing himself on the ground, he filled his pipe and settled back against a rock, while she seated herself with her back against the bole of a banksian. "What are you going to do, Annette?" he asked after a few moments of strained silence.

"Why—I—I do not know. There is nothing to do. Stay here and—and—why just stay."

Brian shook his head. "You can't do that."

"Why not? This is my home. I do not want to go away. There is no place to go."

"Listen, Annette. Do you know how your father lived?"

"How he lived?"

"I mean, how did he get the money to buy food, and clothing, and books? He was not a trapper. I know he spoke something about gold."

"Yes, he always searched for gold. He found the gold. For last fall he told me that we soon should be rich. At the time of the Christmas trading he wrote a letter and he took it to Fort Chipewyan. I do not know whom he wrote the letter to but I think it was about the gold. It must have been of that letter he tried to speak. Do not people write letters about gold?"

"Why, yes, I suppose they would. But had he taken out any gold? Did he trade gold for his supplies at Fort Chipewyan?"

"No, I do not think he had any gold. I never saw any gold. He had paper money. He got the money at Chipewyan and then he bought the supplies."

"But how did he get the money?"

"The factor gave it to him. I do not know why. I never asked my father. Always he would get the money from the factor and would buy the supplies, and if

there was any money left he would bring it home. He kept it in a small box beneath his bed and when he would start for Chipewyan he would take it out and put it in his pocketbook. I do not know why he did that, because at the Fort he would always get more money. I think the pocketbook with the money is in his pocket now."

"No, I removed the things from his pockets. They are here." Stepping to the net box beside the operating table, Brian returned in a moment with a neatly made caribou-skin wallet, a knife, a waterproof match box, a pipe, and a small sack of tobacco, which he laid in the girl's lap. "You had better count the money."

"You must help," she said, listlessly opening the wallet. "I have never counted any money. I know, of course, that these papers are worth the number of dollars that is stamped upon them. But I do not understand why this should be so. My father has told me that it has to do with banks and with the government. But I am afraid I did not care enough about it to remember what he said."

Together they counted the money. "One hundred and sixteen dollars," announced Brian. "Is that all he had, or is there more in the box under his bunk?"

"We will look. But I think there will be none, for he was bound for Chipewyan when—when he was shot. Why do you ask? Is that much money, or little? And will not the factor give us more, if we need it?"

Brian smiled, "It is more than I have. It will last you for a while. I will speak to Leith and he will give you more when that is gone. But this gold of your father's. Do you know where he found it?"

"No. I know only that he told me he had found it

and that soon we would be rich. I did not care much except that I was glad he had found the gold that he had searched for so long. It gave him much happiness. Why should one want to be rich? We have always had all we wanted and we have many times helped the Indians, who some years are very poor. One could not do more if he were rich, could he?"

"I don't understand any more than you do why anyone should want to be rich. For myself, a good outfit, and plenty to eat, and I'm happy. Except that I want to know a lot more than I do."

"Why should you want to know more? Are you going to a school?"

"I don't know that I will go to a school. But I'm going to learn some way. I'm going to talk with Father Giroux and Seth Adams. I am just beginning to realize how little I know. And I'll never be happy till I learn all about a lot of things."

Annette shook her head doubtfully. "I do not think that great learning brings happiness. My father was a man of great learning. My mother told me that he had been educated to be a scientist. In the house are many books from which he often read—books I do not understand, for I have not great learning. I have watched him as he read these books, and I could not see that they made him happy. Only was he happy when he was with my mother, and with me. He found his happiness in us—not in books."

"But think of the satisfaction of knowing about many things."

"I do not think that brings happiness," answered the girl stubbornly. "I have been more happy than my father and I do not know about many things.

My mother and my father taught me to read and to write in English, and in French, and in German; and I have read the histories, and have studied geography, and something of philosophy and of biology. Philosophy I do not like, but I read much of it, mostly in the German, because my father wanted me to. But I do not think it has added to my happiness."

"I should like to have known your father."

"You would have loved him. No one could help loving him. He was always so kind, and so good, and so patient. He first met my mother when he was going to a college, and they wanted to be married, but her father and my father's father were bitter enemies—it was something about politics which I do not understand—and they commanded my father and mother not to marry. But they could not keep them from loving each other and when my father finished at the college he came into possession of a small amount of money from the estate of his mother, who was dead. So he and my mother went away and got married. The families of each were terribly angry and would have nothing more to do with them. Both my mother's father and my father's father were very rich but they cut my mother and my father off without one dollar of all the money they had—because they loved each other and were married! So others got all of the money and my father and my mother came away from there and have always lived in the North, where my father searched for gold."

The girl ceased speaking and minutes passed as Brian puffed slowly at his pipe. Finally he broke the silence. "They did what was right—your father and mother—and I am sure the happiness they found in each other,

and in you, and in the North, was far greater than any happiness they could have got out of the riches of their fathers. These old men must have died long ago but their children—the brothers and sisters of your father and mother—may still be living, some of them. Do you know the names of these people—your aunts and your uncles?"

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, her eyes widening, and a slight flush deepening the brown of her cheeks.

"Only that if you could get in touch with them—go to them, maybe, and tell them——"

"Go to them! Go to those people who treated my mother and my father as they did! Who drove them out and withheld from them that which rightfully belongs to them! No, I do not know their names! And I do not want to know them!" She pointed a trembling finger toward the mounds and the deep, rich voice shook with passion. "There lie the two I loved and who loved me! Do you suppose, now that they are dead, that I would go crawling to those who scorned them, who cast them out, who despised and persecuted them? If you do, you do not know how a Beauleau or a Fontenelle can hate! If I should go to those people I would be a traitor to the love of my mother and my father! On these graves I swear I will never go to them—never speak their names! I would spit upon them—strike them in the face—shoot them!"

Astounded at the outburst of hatred, Brian could only stare speechless until it was concluded. Never, he thought, had the girl seemed so beautiful as with blazing eyes she castigated her people. A tragic figure—superb in her hatred—facing a world of which she

knew nothing with spirit unbroken. He smiled to relieve the tension—to soften the girl's mood. "In that case," he said, "maybe you'd better not go."

"I will never go to them! I would die first."

"But you can't stay here alone. The Indians have gone from the lake. There is food enough for only a little while. A thousand things might happen—accidents—sickness. The very loneliness would kill you—or drive you mad. The long hours of brooding—then, voices in the night—voices that are not there—eyes peering from the silent dark—things moving without sound, without colour, without form—or with sounds, and colours, and forms that never were—delirium—madness, which is worse than death."

There were tears in the girl's eyes and she dropped to her knees beside him and laid a hand upon his shoulder. "Then, Brian, you must stay with me!"

The touch of her hand, her words, set his heart pounding. "But Annette——"

She interrupted hurriedly before he could voice an objection. "Listen, Brian. You love me—in your eyes I have seen it—and I know that it is love. And I love you! I love you even more, I think, than I loved my father and my mother. It is different love. This love for you is a fierce wild love that is almost like a pain—a thrill runs through me at the touch of your hand that is like nothing I have ever known—but I know it is love. Stay here with me, Brian, and we will live here and love, even as my father and my mother lived here and loved until they died. And together we will search for my father's gold and together we will hunt, and fish, and read. And I will look after you always, and cook, and——"

The impassioned entreaty of the words, the light in the hazel eyes—not blazing, now, but looking deep into his own with the soft devouring adoration, the touch of her hand, all but swept Brian into the engulfing vortex of young love. Almost, he reached his two arms and crushed the lovely body to his own—almost. Then, steeling himself as a man fights against odds with his back to the wall, he spoke, and the words sounded flat and vapid in his ears. "But—we are not married."

"I do not care. Why should we care what the world thinks? We two, alone. You are all I need in life—and you will learn that I am all you need. The Beauleaus and the Fontenelles can hate—and they can love as they hate—and I am both a Beauleau and a Fontenelle! I suppose you are right. We should be married. We can find this Father Giroux of whom you spoke. He is a priest of the church of my mother. He shall marry us, and we will return and bring our supplies with us from Chipewyan. Come! Let us go. We can camp to-night on the lake."

But Brian was silent, fighting desire, and the longing to gather her into his arms and carry her to Father Giroux, and to return to this little cabin beside the unmapped river. He knew he loved this girl to the uttermost fibre of his being. And he knew she had spoken the truth when she said that he would learn that she was all he needed. But would life here in the cabin satisfy, on down through the years? Even though they should find old Jovin Beauleau's gold, if indeed he had found gold. Here in his North, would not everything taunt him with his ignorance, now that he had come to realize that ignorance?

Mistaking his silence for coldness, Annette rose

abruptly to her feet, and glancing into her face Brian saw that the light was gone from her eyes and the colour had faded from her cheeks: "You do not want me," she said, and the voice that a moment before had been vibrant with love sounded toneless and cold.

As she turned from him he caught her hand and leaping to his feet stood looking down upon the midnight darkness of her hair. He spoke, and the calmness of his own voice surprised him. "I do want you, Annette! I want you more than any words I have can tell. I want you—and some day I will have you. But not now. I have determined to get an education—to learn many things. If I could marry you now and get my education, I would do it. That is impossible, for I have no money. We will go, as you say, to Father Giroux and you can live at the mission until I have got my education. Then we will be married."

"Go and get your education!" The hand was jerked violently from his own and the girl faced him with blazing eyes. "I do not love you! I hate you! Go back to your rivers and your provinces! What do I care? I shall stay here! I hope I *will* die! I hope I *will* go mad!" And, turning abruptly, she fled from him and disappeared within the doorway of the cabin.

For some moments Brian stood where she had left him. Then, knocking the ashes from his pipe, he walked to the new-made grave, picked up the tools, and, carrying them into the pole shed, secured the door. Descending to the river, he righted the canoe, took his empty pack sack from it, and, entering the cabin without a glance toward the bunk, proceeded methodically to stow his belongings.

When he had finished he set the sack outside and,

reëntering the cabin, stood for a moment looking down at the girl who lay on her blankets, her face buried in her arms. "Get up, Annette," he said in the same level voice in which he had outlined his plans.

Receiving no reply, nor the slightest movement that told him she had heard, he turned from the bunk and very deliberately began to pack the two pack sacks he found in the cabin—the one Jovin Beauleau had carried on his fatal journey, and another he found hanging from a peg on the wall. From other pegs he removed several dresses and a nightgown which he carefully folded and stowed in the top of a pack. Opening the box from which Annette had taken the wooden doll, he transferred all her wearing apparel to the pack, and from beneath her bunk he withdrew several pairs of moccasins and a pair of stout boots. From the table he selected a knife, a fork, a spoon, and a plate, and when these had joined the other things he glanced about the room, looked to the fastenings of the single window, carried the two packs outside, and returned to the bunk.

"It is time to go, Annette," he said. "To-night we will camp on the lake." The words fell upon the ears of the girl in the tone of velvet softness she had heard once before and she knew that behind the softly spoken words was the chilled steel that was the will of Brian O'Neill. She knew that her things were packed. By the sounds as he moved about the cabin she had followed his every movement. There had been something terrible, inexorable about those methodical, unhurried movements. Over and over again as the sounds progressed her brain had repeated the words "I hate him!" "I hate him!" "I hate him!" And hate him or

not, she knew that nothing she could say or could do would bend that iron will one hair's breadth from the course it had mapped out. "It is time to go," he had said. "To-night we will camp on the lake." And she knew that she must go and that to-night they would camp on the lake.

She stood up and faced him, her eyes meeting his in a gaze as calm and as level as his own. "I hate you," she said.

He nodded without speaking and, stepping past her, stripped the blankets from her bunk. As he did so the grotesque wooden doll thudded to the floor. "What's that?" he asked, eyeing the puppet in surprise.

Stooping swiftly, she gathered it into her arms. "The only thing in the world that I love," she answered, and waited in silence till he made the blankets into a pack.

Following him outside, she waited while he closed and secured the door by means of a wooden pin. Without a word he picked up two of the packs and carried them to the canoe. When he turned to go for the others he found Annette standing beside him with the pack and the blanket roll at her feet. He opened his lips to speak, but the girl turned away, and in silence he stowed the duffle amidships. Without a word the girl picked up a paddle and took her place in the bow.

At the foot of the falls they cached the canoe in its accustomed place, and as Brian reached for his two packs he noted that the girl was already skilfully adjusting her tumpline. As she picked up the blanket roll he reached for it. "I'll take that," he said, and when she refused to surrender it he motioned her to precede him up the trail.

"Afraid I will run away if your back is turned?" she asked.

Brian ignored the sneer in the voice. "No. I want you to set the pace."

A mighty rage welled within her as she struck off up the rocky trail. Who was this man, all-sufficient unto himself, that had come thus suddenly into her life to dominate it—to change its course—to order her comings and her goings? He was not afraid she would try to escape because he knew she could not escape him, and worst of all, he knew that she knew this. He offered to pack more than his share of the outfit—her outfit, for the most part—and he had made her set the pace for the obvious reason that he did not want to tire her, or to leave her far behind on the trail. Vividly his words repeated themselves in her brain. "I want you and some day I will have you." The calm assurance of the statement stung her as no flaunting or boasting could have stung her. There was no flaunting or boasting about Brian O'Neill. With the utmost self-confidence he went ahead and did the things he could do; and the things he could not do he calmly asserted that he would learn to do. "I will *never* marry him—*never! never!*" she murmured to herself. "*I hate him!* And—it is a long way from here to the mission of this Father Giroux!"

Chapter X

AN AFFAIR OF BUSINESS

SEATED at her desk in the boudoir of her palatial Quebec home, Madame Latrobe read for the third time the letter that had come by the morning post carefully folded in a packet that contained several small fragments of rough-looking rock. For a long time she sat staring at the letter and idly fingering the rock fragments, as her brain followed the back trail of the years. So Jovin was still alive—this brother who so many years ago had defied his family, relinquished a fortune, and with his young bride had disappeared from the ken of all who had known him. And now he was writing to offer her a half interest in a venture that promised a fortune for each. She picked up the letter and once again scanned the lines.

"We have lived continually in the outlands, and in each other, and in our little daughter we have found contentment and happiness. . . . Three years ago my wife died. . . . I care nothing for wealth. It is not for myself but for my daughter that I am asking that you finance this enterprise. . . ." The finely chiselled lips set in a hard line as Madame Latrobe's eyes wandered from the letter to the richly appointed furnishings of the room. So he had found contentment and happiness—in a cabin—in a tent, maybe—living like a savage. While she, with the inherited wealth that should have

been half Jovin's, had known neither happiness nor contentment.

In marrying Aristide Latrobe she had followed the dictate of her father. A truly fine match, people said at the time, in that it brought together two families of social prominence and vast wealth. She laughed, a hard, bitter laugh, at remembrance of some of the devilishly ingenious cruelties of Aristide Latrobe. Thank God he spent most of his time in Paris and on the Riviera! And Celeste, their daughter—a Latrobe through and through. Happiness—contentment! And again, the hard, bitter laugh. If Jovin only knew how little of the Beauleau fortune was left. This home and an annuity—nothing more.

Cold rage seized the woman. Snatching up the letter, she crumpled it and stamped upon it. Who was Jovin to taunt her with his happiness! She had found life an ugly thing—a thing of hollow pleasures and of bitter disillusionments.

Another paper caught her eye—the certified report of a firm of assayers. The analysis meant next to nothing to her—gold, silver, lead in their various proportions—but penned across the bottom were the words: "These samples constitute a high-grade galena extraordinarily rich in gold."

Jovin had found gold and he needed her help to get it.

Jovin had made his bed, now let him lie in it! Let his gold rot in the hills! His daughter was also a daughter of a Fontenelle. Then the very name of Fontenelle gave her pause. If she should ignore this letter, what more natural than that Jovin would apply to the Fontenelles for the money to finance the operations? The Fontenelle wealth had not been dissipated as had the Beauleau

fortune. There was Darien Fontenelle, the brother of Jovin's wife—a man of character and of business ability. Suppose he had not harboured hatred against this sister who had committed the crime of marrying a Beauleau.

As her rage flamed at the thought the woman's eyes gleamed with an almost insane light. At least she had never ceased to hate! The very name of Fontenelle was anathema in her ears. Never if she could help it would Darien Fontenelle profit by Jovin's gold. Perhaps she could find the money. She wondered how much would be needed. The mansion and its furnishings were her own. She could raise a goodly sum on them. Aristide Latrobe need never know of the venture, nor would he ever see a penny of the gold that would be hers! She would be in a position to drive a hard bargain. Jovin, with his years in the outlands, would know little of business. And Jovin's daughter—little savage—who was also the daughter of a Fontenelle, would know nothing at all!

Picking the crumpled letter from the floor, she smoothed it. "Fort Chipewyan—wherever that is," she muttered, and then half aloud she read: "I will go to Fort Chipewyan toward the last of June. A letter will reach me there, or if you desire to send an agent I will meet him. If he should be delayed until after that time he will find an Indian at Chipewyan named Johnny Big Fish, who will guide him to my cabin. . . ." She laid the letter aside with a shrug. "Ugh! 'Johnny Big Fish' —'Fort Chipewyan.' Names that fairly reek of the wilderness and of savagery!"

For a long time she sat thinking. Then suddenly she sprang erect. Diamonds flashed as she clapped her hands together. "The very man!" she breathed. "Thibaut

Colbert will stop at nothing to gain an end. He has travelled the wilderness and he hates Aristide Latrobe! At least my secret will be safe from my husband with him."

An hour later Thibaut Colbert was shown into the room—a large man, whose shifty eyes seemed to dart from beneath beetling black brows. He took the proffered chair with a bow and came directly to the point. "You sent for me, madame? I am surprised that I should be summoned to the home of Aristide Latrobe."

"To the home of his wife," returned the woman haughtily.

"An important distinction," he observed with a knowing smile. "And monsieur is——?"

"In France."

"And the reason I am honoured?"

"A matter of business. It is possible that we may enter into an arrangement that will be profitable to both. Do you know anything of gold?"

"I have not the intimate acquaintance with it that I could wish," answered the man with a smile.

"I mean gold as it is found in mines."

"I have had some experience in mining ventures."

"Do you know what these are?" She handed him the samples and noted that his eyes gleamed with avarice as he scrutinized them.

"It looks like a high-grade ore but I would not venture an opinion until I had seen a report."

"The report is here." She handed him the paper and he studied it for a time before looking up. When he returned the paper she noted that his hand was not quite steady.

"The most promising proposition I have ever seen,"

he said, evidently striving to disguise the eagerness in his voice. "Who made the strike? And where? What has it to do with you? And why am I called in?"

"My brother found the gold. He has appealed to me because he is unable to finance the enterprise. And I have appealed to you because—because——"

She hesitated and the man smiled cynically. "Let us, at least, be frank between ourselves, madame. Primarily, you have appealed to me because you are certain that nothing that passes between us will reach the ears of your husband. Secondly, because you know that I have spent much time beyond the outposts of civilization and have been interested, more or less intimately, in mining ventures. Thirdly, because you believe I would not hesitate to violate, shall we say, the ethics, to gain an end. If I am right in my surmises I may add that I think you have chosen wisely. So we lay our cards upon the table. This brother you mentioned—I presume that he will demand the lion's share in this venture? And, by the way, you forgot to tell me where it is."

"He offered me a half interest if I would finance it. I hate him! I would take every dollar if I could. The more you succeed in wresting from him the better I will be pleased. Do you care to undertake the venture?"

"You have not told me where it is."

The woman smiled. "You will pardon me if I withhold that information until you have given me your answer."

"As an equal partner—share and share alike, in whatever interest we may obtain?" The woman hesitated and Colbert continued. "Remember, madame, your part is merely to furnish the funds to place this enterprise upon a paying basis; while mine is not only to investi-

gate the property but to make an advantageous agreement with your brother, and to manage the venture ostensibly as your agent. I may add that if there is any considerable deposit as rich as these samples show we neither of us need fear for the future. As an equal partner with you my own interests would be identical with yours."

The woman nodded slowly. "I suppose you are right. You drive a hard bargain. I hope you will do as well with my brother. Do you know where Fort Chipewyan is?"

"Yes."

"It is there you may meet my brother, Jovin Beauleau, at the end of June."

The man smiled. "Which means that I must start at once and travel fast. Suppose I miss him at Chipewyan? It is a long journey to make for nothing."

"Should you not meet him there you are to find an Indian named—" she paused and referred to the letter—"named Johnny Big Fish and he will guide you to my brother's cabin. But perhaps you had best read the letter."

Colbert read and reread the letter, which he returned. "There is a daughter, then?"

He was quick to note the gleam of hate that leaped into the woman's eyes as she answered: "Yes. Doubtless a half-savage thing that has lived her life among the Indians of the wilderness. It should not be hard for one of your ability to further our interests at the expense of theirs."

"I think," smiled the man, "that you may safely leave the matter in my hands. And now—the matter of expense. I shall need, for this preliminary investigation, at least one thousand dollars."

"How much money will I be asked to advance? And how long will it be before we will begin to profit by the adventure?"

"That, my dear madame, will depend entirely upon circumstances—the availability of the ore, its location in regard to water and transportation, and a hundred and one things that can only be determined by a thorough investigation. You shall have my report upon my return."

"When shall you start?"

"That depends entirely upon you—and the thousand dollars."

"If I hand you the money within the hour?"

"I shall be on board the first train that leaves Quebec for the West to-morrow morning."

"Call, then, in an hour. And when may I look for your return?"

The man shrugged. "Two months—six—one cannot tell. You will note that the letter you just received was posted at Chipewyan at Christmas."

When the man had gone Madame Latrobe picked up the letter, which, together with the assayers' report and the samples, she placed in a wall safe. "Happiness —contentment!"— the words fairly hissed from her drawn lips and the door closed with a sharp click upon her hard, bitter laugh.

Chapter XI

BACK AT THE CABIN

In silence Brian O'Neill and Annette Beauleau dragged the canoe from its cache at the upper end of the portage trail, took their places, and paddled across the lake. And in silence they ate their supper as the long twilight faded into starlit dark. When the meal was finished Brian picked up his blankets and, without a word, disappeared into the deep blackness of the bordering spruce forest.

Beside the dying embers of the little cooking fire Annette sat tense, listening to the cracking of twigs and the swish of branches that told of the man's progress through the thick timber. Presently the sounds ceased and she knew he was spreading his blankets. Her anger flamed afresh at this new manifestation of his supreme self-assurance. The canoe was on the beach, her things in their pack sacks beside it, yet he had not taken the slightest precaution to prevent her from launching the canoe and paddling back to the cabin! Against her will, and in the face of her angry protests, he had ordered her to accompany him to the mission—therefore she would accompany him to the mission. And that was the end of it. He had walked away and spread his blankets and was probably even now soundly asleep.

Out on the lake a loon laughed mockingly.

Red embers faded into gray ash. From the silence of

the sedge a night bird croaked hoarsely. The girl rose to her feet, stood for tense moments peering into the dense blackness that had swallowed Brian O'Neill, and swiftly and silently made her way to the canoe. For a moment she stood under the glittering stars. Impulsively she stretched out her arms toward the little cabin beyond the black waters—the little cabin she had always called home. Hot tears filled her eyes.

In the blurred starlight she launched the canoe, her heart in her throat as its bark bottom scraped softly on the gravel. Shipping her pack sacks, blankets, and paddles, she pushed noiselessly out into the lake.

She camped that night on the trail at the head of the portage with the width of the lake between herself and Brian O'Neill. In the morning she cached the canoe and with one of her packs and her blanket roll strode swiftly down the trail, launched the other canoe, and so arrived at the cabin where she cooked and ate a hearty breakfast. She returned upriver for the other pack. The rest of the day she spent in tidying up the cabin and carefully stowing her things into their accustomed places. Toward evening she strolled to the bluff overlooking the river and for a long, long time stood looking down at the two mounds. Then she went to bed and after a time fell asleep with the grotesque wooden doll clutched tightly to her breast.

After breakfast next morning she chopped and piled a quantity of firewood. She took inventory of the food that Brian had packed down, estimated its value, and decided it would last a month if she had good luck with her nets and her rifle. By that time Brian O'Neill would be far away and she would make the journey to Fort Chipewyan, leave money to repay Brian with the factor,

and purchase supplies to last until Christmas. She was glad she had returned to the cabin. Things would go on about the same as before, except that she would miss her father—the reading aloud, and the long talks in the twilight.

She spent a couple of hours setting nets in the river. When the task was finished and she stepped from her canoe, her eye was attracted to a piece of cloth that lay half-concealed by the coarse grass close to the water's edge. Idly she walked over and stood looking down at the shirt stained with blood and sweat that she had tossed aside when Brian O'Neill would have drawn it on over his lacerated shoulders. Slowly she stooped, picked up the shirt, and, stepping to the water, put it to soak, weighting it down with stones. In the evening she washed it and hung it on a limb to dry.

She awoke early the following morning and, water pail in hand, walked to the spring beside the river. Dropping the pail, she stooped eagerly to examine the tracks of a moose that showed in the gravel and in the mud between the spring and the river. A cow, or a young bull, she decided, travelling slowly, probably making for the shallows of a backwater three or four miles down-river. Racing to the cabin, she snatched up the rifle and half a dozen cartridges and a few moments later was paddling swiftly downstream.

The animal was not in the shallows, and, beaching the canoe, she struck off to the westward where, a couple of miles inland, a sedgy lake that was a favourite feeding place for moose lay between the timber and a broad muskeg. Often she had helped her father to pack moose meat from the lake to the canoe. As she neared the lake she crept cautiously through the thick scrub, her objec-

tive being a point that separated two shallow bays.

She had almost reached the edge when a mighty splashing startled her, and, crashing through the scrub, she was just in time to see two moose disappear into the thicket not fifty yards away. She stood for a moment, a puzzled frown on her face. Surely she had made no sound—not even a tiny twig had crackled beneath her moccasins. Then she knew, and the knowledge brought a flush of anger to her cheeks. The wind! So intent had she been in proceeding noiselessly that she had forgotten to take into account the light breeze that was blowing directly from her to the spot where the moose had been feeding. A glaring bit of carelessness! A thing one might expect of a chechahco, but not of one who had spent her whole life in the bush. If she must expect to live by her rifle she could not afford to make mistakes.

She would get some traps when she went to Chipewyan. Johnny Big Fish had taught her how to set for the fur bearers. Her anger faded and she smiled as she remembered Johnny Big Fish, the young Indian who had camped the previous winter across the river from the cabin, and whose trapline extended for miles along the river and among the lakes to the westward. He had wanted to marry her and had become so insistent that her father had chased him from the river.

She liked Johnny Big Fish. At least, he would never order her to leave her home and go and live at a mission! Her father had said he was lazy because he hung about the fort all summer. But in the winter he worked hard at his traps; why should he not hang about the fort in the summer? Her father did nothing in winter but shoot a few caribou and read his books—and winter is longer than summer. Johnny Big Fish would be at the

fort now. Vaguely, she wondered what he would do when he learned that her father was dead.

Back at the cabin she stood the rifle in its corner and ate a hearty breakfast, for she was ravenously hungry and it was nearly noon. She was still at the table when a shadow darkened the room and she looked up to see a man standing in the doorway. He was a large man and his lips were smiling, even as his bright shifty eyes seemed to dart from beneath shaggy black eyebrows to take in every detail of the room. When at length they came to rest upon her she shrank from their penetrating glance. There was something loathsome—something she hated in those eyes. She felt suddenly ashamed—as though she sat there naked before their searching gaze. Then the smiling lips moved. "Where is Jovin Beauleau?"

"Who are you?" countered the girl. "And why do you want to see my father?"

"A matter of business, my pretty one—purely a matter of business."

"Is it about the letter?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes. You can see his grave beside the grave of my mother, there near the edge of the bluff."

The man turned and for several moments he stared at the freshly heaped mound. As he faced her again the gleaming eyes seemed to gleam even more brightly. "And you are living here alone?"

"Yes. Alone. And now I wish you would go away. You cannot see my father."

"Not so fast!" He laughed. "Seeing we're all so

cozy here, and no one to bother, I can do business with you, perhaps, even better than with your father."

"What do you mean?" The words came hurriedly, jerkily, and in her heart Annette Beauleau realized that for the first time in her life she knew the meaning of fear.

The man stepped boldly into the cabin, crossed to her side, and laid a hand upon her shoulder. She shrank from the touch and again he laughed. "I mean just this: You and I have a very good thing—in fact, we're rich. Jovin Beauleau never filed his claim. All we've got to do is to step out and file in our own names—and the old lady can whistle for hers!"

The girl was on her feet now, facing him, the table between them. "I do not understand a thing you are saying! Go away from here!"

"Not so fast, Star Eyes; I am not going away. In fact, I expect to stay here for quite some time. I like the surroundings and I am charmed by the company. When you and I understand each other we will get along famously."

"Who are you?" cried the girl, her heart cold with terror. "Where do you come from? Why are you here?"

"Now we progress," answered the man approvingly. He settled into her father's chair, removed his hat, and placed it upon the floor beside him. "Be seated, please. We have business to transact and we may as well discuss it in comfort." Annette remained standing and he continued. "My name is Thibaut Colbert. I am, let us say, a business adventurer. I am here at the earnest solicitation of your most estimable aunt."

"My aunt!"

"Yes—the sister of your father."

"I hate them!" cried the girl. "I hate them all!"

"Than which there could be no more holy sentiment," agreed the man, rolling his eyes in mock piety. "I fear they are not to be trusted. But to return to our business: Your father wrote to her, inclosing ore samples and offering her a half interest in his venture if she would finance it. Knowing nothing of mining, and having reason to distrust her husband, she appealed to me as a man of sterling character, offering me a half interest in all or any part of the property that I could wrest from you and your father. In other words she would be overjoyed to freeze you and your father out entirely and divide the property with me. I had little sympathy with her dishonest scheme, and since meeting you, my dear, I have still less. In fact, I have so little sympathy with it that I have decided to leave her out of our plans entirely—serve her as she would have served you and your father. Very fortunately your father neglected, through accident or design, to file his claim, which fact reduces our problem to one of the utmost simplicity. We will file the claim, or claims, and should the property prove to be anywhere near as valuable as the samples indicate, we will make millions. What do you say?"

The girl leaned forward upon the knuckles of her doubled fists, her eyes meeting unflinchingly the restless eyes of the man. "I say exactly what I said before. Go away from here and leave me alone! I know nothing of claims, and samples, and financing. If you do not go I think I will kill you!"

The man ignored the threat. "You know your father found gold?"

"Yes, but I do not want gold."

The words were received with a smile. "In that case,

my dear, we can quickly strike a bargain. It is merely that you show me the place where your father found his gold and I will agree to go away and molest you no further."

"I do not know where he found the gold. And if I did know I would never tell you."

The man leaped to his feet with a snarl. "You lie! You damned hussy! You do know! And you will talk! I've made people talk before!" He lurched toward her, overturning the table, and with a scream she tried to slip past him. But he was too quick for her, cutting off her retreat to the door. For a long moment the two stood facing each other. "Go away!" she cried hysterically, "or I'll kill you!"

A sneering laugh greeted the words, and as the man was about to advance upon her he saw the hazel eyes stare past him out through the open door. A glad cry broke from the girl's lips. "Johnny Big Fish!"

The man whirled, whipping an automatic from its holster under his arm. As the Indian leaped with drawn knife two reports rang almost as one and Johnny Big Fish crashed to the floor just within the threshold. The body strained convulsively, relaxed, and lay still. Colbert raised his eyes to the horror-widened eyes of the girl, who was staring in a daze at Johnny Big Fish, the long knife still clutched in his dead hand. "It was self-defense," he muttered, more to himself than to the girl, who, oblivious to the words, had dropped to her knees beside the still form.

With an oath Colbert jerked her to her feet and shook her violently. "You listen to me! If he'd minded his own business he'd be alive now. Another second and he'd had that knife in my ribs. This puts a new face on the matter.

You've got to throw in with me now—throw in with me heart and soul!" He paused, twisting her arm cruelly and jamming her against the wall. "You'll keep your mouth shut or if you do open it you'll say what I tell you to say—do you hear? You'll marry me—Scotch marriage, at that. Then you can't testify against me—or else, by God, I'll put you where he is! I'll be damned if I'll swing for killing an Injun!"

"Marry you?" asked the girl in a dull voice. And again: "Marry you?"

The hazel eyes looking calmly into his own steadied Colbert. He released her arm and spoke hurriedly. "Yes, beautiful one—marry me. Why not? With the old man's mine we will be sitting on top of the world. I'm sorry I—I used violence. I was excited. Things happened—suddenly. And seeing you there on the floor beside that damned Injun—it made me see red."

She stepped away from the wall slowly. Her eyes wandered about the little room. Colbert noted that they came to rest upon the body of the Indian, but did not note that their glance had registered the exact position of the rifle that stood loaded in its corner. "But what about Johnny Big Fish?"

A short, dry laugh greeted the words. "There's the river. The hot weather and the fish will take care of him. Come take me to your father's shaft."

"Shaft?" The hazel eyes held a peculiar vacant expression, and the voice sounded listless, as though the recently enacted tragedy had dulled the girl's sensibilities.

"Yes, yes! The shaft, or tunnel, or drift, or whatever he calls the hole that he takes his gold from."

"But," she said in the same listless tone, "we cannot

leave the cabin like this." Her eyes roved from the body of the Indian to the overturned table and the dishes that littered the floor.

Colbert agreed with alacrity. "No—of course not! Here, I'll right the table and then we can carry him down to the river."

Annette's heart sank. She had little time to think. Already the man was stooping over the table. It was now, or never—and the rifle halfway across the room. Almost at a bound she reached it—grasped it—drew back the hammer. Colbert was upon her with a snarl. The rifle was sent spinning from her grasp and she was hurled backward, staggering until the edge of the bunk, catching her behind the knees, tripped her. There was a blinding flash as her head struck the wall. The room roared with a deafening report . . . oblivion.

Chapter XII

SHOTS

BRIAN O'NEILL opened his eyes and for some moments lay in that delicious borderland that is neither sleep nor wakefulness. Beneath the interlaced spruce boughs daylight was perpetual drab monotone. It might have been noon or twilight. Somewhere a three-toed woodpecker was tapping persistently but intermittently as it flitted from tree to tree. A sapsucker industriously explored a trunk within ten feet of Brian's head, and a red squirrel scolded noisily with ludicrous quirks of its arched tail. Familiar sounds—these. As familiar to Brian O'Neill as the rattle of a milk cart or the whine of an early trolley to an urbanite. No other sound came to his ears, and a trifle grimly he smiled.

Drawing on his clothing, he gathered his blankets and made his way to the point where he and Annette had landed late in the evening. The canoe was gone, and with it the girl and her duffel. His own pack lay where he had left it, and beside the dead ashes of the little fire lay the unwashed dishes of the evening meal.

Again Brian smiled, stripped off his clothing, and plunged into the lake. Emerging presently, every fibre atingle, he dressed and ate his breakfast. "I knew she'd go back," he breathed exultantly. "The stuff's there—old Jovin was conscious when I dug that bullet out! Now I'll go and get her!"

He washed, cached the dishes and such of his outfit as he would not need, and, slipping the light pack onto his shoulders, struck out along the beach.

It was no easy journey that confronted Brian O'Neill. For every mile of sand or gravel there were other miles of muck where the lake bordered upon swamps, and he was forced to wallow, sometimes waist deep, between submerged trunks and the roots of trees. At times he would leave the beach and for miles follow a ridge, but the general trend of the ridges was transverse to his course.

He camped that night upon a high hill, from the apex of which he was able to pick up with his glass the tree he had lobbed on the ridge near the mouth of the river. He estimated he had completed half the journey.

But half a journey in distance may not be half a journey in time when travelling afoot in the Northland. By noon Brian had left the ridges behind and he found himself confronted by a broad muskeg whose surface presented not even the precarious footing of a quaking bog, and whose depths were illimitable muck. He thought of rafting along the shore, but with only a belt ax for a tool and green spruce for material, the task seemed hopeless. Following the ill-defined margin of the muskeg was worse even than following the shore of the lake. Evening found him miles back from the lake, but with the muskeg behind him. As it narrowed he had crossed on quaking bog, swum a river, and found himself again among ridges.

In the morning he ate the last of his grub and, taking his bearings, struck a course that should bring him out on the river at no great distance from the cabin of Jovin Beauleau. Toward noon the roar of the waterfall told

him he was nearing the river, and a short time later he came out upon the foot trail that led to the cabin. "Wonder what she'll be doing," he muttered with a grin. "She ought to know I'd come back—but she wouldn't be expecting me till to-morrow. I've made good time."

A hundred yards from the little clearing he stopped dead in his tracks. Two shots sounding almost as one stabbed the air. By no possible chance could it have been the voice of the old single-shot rifle that was the only firearm possessed by Jovin Beauleau. With his heart in his throat Brian leaped forward. At the edge of the clearing he paused. No one was in sight. From the cabin, scarcely thirty feet distant, came the sound of a voice—the voice of a man. Silent as a shadow, Brian crossed the clearing and took a position close beside the single window. He wanted to look in, but dared not. "I'll be damned if I'll swing for killing an Injun," the voice was saying—and then, the voice of Annette: "Marry you?"

Who was this man? Why was he here? And what was this talk of marrying? Brian's first impulse was to dash around the corner of the cabin and confront the two. But certainly there had been nothing of excitement in the voice of the girl when she had repeated the two words "Marry you?"

Nor was there hint of excitement in the voice of the man whose tone had become apologetic, almost caressing in its suave smoothness. ". . . things happened suddenly . . . seeing you there on the floor beside that damned Injun—it made me see red." There was the sound of movement within the cabin, and again the voice of the girl. "But what about Johnny Big Fish?"

Then the nasty, rasping laugh. "There's the river. The hot weather and the fish will take care of him." So there was an Indian on the floor—a dead Indian—and that Indian was Johnny Big Fish! That would explain the shots. Brian knew Johnny Big Fish—rather liked him. Who was this man who was trying to persuade Annette to marry him? And why was Johnny Big Fish lying dead on the floor?

The voices were speaking again, but Brian could not catch the words. Was it possible that, despite her avowal of love for him, there was another? True, she had told him later that she hated him. Was it to meet this man she had returned to the cabin? Was he a fool?

Sudden commotion sounded from within the room—a beastlike snarl from the throat of the man, the crash with which the rifle ricocheted from the wall to the floor.

Brian reached the doorway in time to see Annette stagger backward and crash upon the bunk. With rifle at cock he leaped across the sprawling form of the Indian, just as Colbert whirled and reached for his automatic.

There was a loud explosion as Brian fired from the hip.

The hand never reached the holster. Colbert straightened and stood for a moment staring straight into Brian's face, a look of bewilderment, of puzzled surprise, in the eyes that stared out from beneath the beetling black brows. Then a torrent of red blood gushed from between the parted lips, and the man crashed forward upon his face and lay very still.

For a moment Brian stood, his eyes taking in each detail of the scene—the two forms sprawled head to

head upon the floor, the overturned table, the unconscious form of the girl on the bunk. Crossing the room, he ascertained that she was breathing regularly. The blue lump rapidly rising on her temple just at the edge of the hair accounted for her condition. His first impulse was to bring her to, and his eye sought the water pail on the wash bench beside the door. Instead he arranged her into a comfortable position and, laying aside his rifle, proceeded methodically to set the cabin in order.

Dragging the two bodies from the room, he righted the table, picked up the scattered dishes, and washed the blood from the floor. Going to the river for a fresh pail of water, his eye caught the flutter of cloth where a garment whipped in the wind. It was his own shirt—the shirt that Annette had snatched from his hand. It had been stiff with sweat and dried blood then—it was clean now. When he returned to the cabin he placed it in the very bottom of his pack sack. Then, as he had done once before, he began to pack Annette's belongings into her two pack sacks.

When he had finished he stepped to the bunk. The girl lay as he had left her, eyes closed, and face turned partly to the wall. A sudden tightening of the muscles told Brian that she had regained consciousness. "Annette," he said.

The eyes opened with a jerk, and for a moment the girl stared up at him, a look of utter bewilderment in her face. "Brian," she murmured, and again: "Brian O'Neill."

"Yes."

She passed her hand across her brow as though to remove cobwebs from her brain. "But . . . Oh, was it all a

dream? I thought there was a man—a terrible man—and Johnny Big Fish lying dead on the floor."

"No, it wasn't a dream. There was a man. And Johnny Big Fish is dead. So is the other. If you feel able to travel we will go now."

"I have been lying here, afraid to open my eyes. I thought it was—that other man."

"He's dead," repeated Brian bluntly. "I shot him."

She sat up, resting for a moment on the edge of the bunk as her eyes took in the details of the room. Everything in order—her two pack sacks packed for the trail. "Let's go," she said simply. "You were right. I cannot stay here alone." At the door she started back at sight of the two bodies. "But what about—these——"

"We'll leave them where they are," answered Brian. "The police will want to look into this."

Chapter XIII

AT THE MISSION OF FATHER GIROUX

THAT evening, at the camp site from which Annette had turned back, she told of the visit of Colbert and of the killing of Johnny Big Fish. "This Colbert was a bad man," she concluded. "I am glad that he is dead. I would have killed him myself but he knocked the rifle from my hands. And then I heard your voice and I opened my eyes and you were there. Why did you come back?"

"You know why I came back," answered Brian gravely. "It is because I love you. I could not leave you there—and you know, now, that I am right. Someday I will marry you, and——"

Impulsively, the girl leaned toward him and placed her hand upon his knee. "Marry me now, Brian. As soon as we get to the mission. We will go back to the cabin and hunt for my father's gold."

Steeling himself against the appeal of the hazel eyes, he slowly shook his head. "No—not now. I have much to learn. You can stay at the mission."

"Will you be at the mission too? Is it at the mission that you will study?"

Brian shook his head. "No. It is of things they do not teach at the mission that I want to learn. I know a man —Seth Adams, who is chief of the Geological Survey of Canada. He will be upon the rivers and he has promised to give me a job. From him I can learn much."

"I will never marry you!" cried the girl. "I do not love you! I hate you! And I will not stay at the mission!"

"We will talk it over with Father Giroux," answered Brian quietly. And as he had done upon that other occasion he picked up his blankets and disappeared into the spruce.

Adverse winds on Lake Athabaska prolonged the journey to six days. It was a journey of awkward silence, punctuated only by the most necessary conversation.

At Fort Chipewyan Brian notified Leith of the death of Jovin Beauleau. "I brought his daughter out with me," he explained. "She said her father always received money from you."

The old Scot combed at his red beard with his fingers. "Aye. Twice each year the money comes—a matter o' five hundred dollars. 'Tis here the noo. I be'n expectin' him. So he's gone, eh? Too bad—too bad. I liked um fine, fer all his harebrained huntin' fer gold. An' so the lass is left alone. I mind his wife died three or four year agone. Will she be goin' outside?"

"No," answered Brian. "I'm taking her down to Father Giroux's. Sometime I'm going to marry her."

The heavy hand of the old man rested upon Brian's shoulder. "Weel spoken, laddie! An' noo ye'll be huntin' a job—a post to run, or whatnot? 'Tis glad I am to see ye settle doon."

"Where's Seth Adams? He promised to give me a job."

"He's gone upriver. He'll be back in a month wi' his crew. But why don't ye ask fer a post? 'Tis a better job fer a family mon than runnin' hither an' yon, crackin' off pieces o' rock, an' mappin' rivers."

Brian smiled. "I'd rather map a river that had never been mapped before than run the best post the Company's got."

"Losh, lad! Ye've an itchin' foot! But wheer's the lass? I must tell her aboot the money. I canna turn it over to her till the public administrator gives me leave."

"She stopped to talk with Amos Clawhammer's wife. I'll send her up. Where is this public administrator? I suppose we'd better make a report to him."

"Report it to the police. Ye'll find Sam Crane doon to Father Giroux's, if you don't meet him comin' back doonriver. He passed yesterday wi' a couple o' Injun kids he was takin' doon to the school."

It was with a heavy heart that Annette followed Brian up the steep bank and along the footpath that led from the landing to the neat, white-painted cottage that was the home of Father Giroux. To the left the mission building with its new dormitory wing stood out bravely against its background of spruce, while to the right the cross-tipped spire of the little chapel rose from a grove of poplars and birches. It was all so strange —so new—so different from the little cabin on the bank of the unmapped river.

Then, like the shadow of a summer cloud, the heaviness vanished as the door of the screened porch opened and a tall man stepped out to greet them, his long silvery hair gleaming in sharp contrast to his sombre cassock. Never had the girl seen eyes so kindly—so fraught with benign understanding—yet eyes that seemed fairly to twinkle with the joy of living. He advanced, extending a hand to each. "Welcome, my children—and shame on you, Brian O'Neill, for neglecting an old man! I heard you had passed down the river."

Brian passed the rebuke with a smile. "Father Giroux, this is Annette Beauleau."

"Beauleau? The daughter of Jovin Beauleau, who lives somewhere to the northward of the lake? I am delighted to meet you, my daughter. Twice I have met your father at Fort Chipewyan. A delightful man—and an honest agnostic. It is my loss that I do not know him better."

"He is dead," answered the girl simply. "He shot himself by accident. Brian came along soon after. We did everything we could but it was no use."

"God's will, my daughter. The time will come to each of us when we must pass beyond."

"She has no place to go, Father. I brought her here."

"You did well." He turned to the girl. "You will be welcome as long as you care to stay, my daughter. It is a privilege to be allowed to minister to the ills of the spirit as well as to those of the flesh. You must be tired. I will call Sister Agatha." He clapped his hands sharply and a half-dozen Indian boys who had been playing ball came running to him. "You, Peter, go fetch Sister Agatha. And the rest of you run down and pack the duffel from the canoe."

When Annette had disappeared with Sister Agatha Brian followed Father Giroux to the porch, where Inspector Crane sat smoking his pipe. "Hello, Brian!" greeted the officer. "You youngsters are the lucky dogs. Who's the lady?"

"Annette Beauleau. Her father was Jovin Beauleau. Lived down north of the lake on a river."

"I know him—prospector. Lives on some kind of a remittance that Leith turns over to him." The inspector paused and grinned. "What's the matter? Wouldn't he

come up for the weddin'? Or is he campin' on your trail with a shotgun? If any young cub stole as good-lookin' a girl from me I'd give him both barrels an' the ramrod!"

Brian smiled into the eyes of the veteran officer whom he had known ever since he could remember. "There will be no wedding—at least, not for a long time. Jovin Beauleau is dead and Annette hates me because I wouldn't let her stay on at the cabin."

"Hate or not, you done right to fetch her out, son. You say Beauleau's dead? Better give me the facts so I can report it. The public administrator will find out where his remittance comes from and authorize me to turn it over to the heirs. She's the only one?"

"Yes, an only child. Her mother died three years ago and from what she's told me I don't think he'd have wanted any of his other relatives to share with her. It's quite a long story—and when you've heard it I think maybe you'll be wanting to go down to the cabin with me and kind of look things over."

The note of gravity in the younger man's tone was not lost upon the veteran officer, nor upon the good Father Giroux who stood holding a match to the bowl of his long-stemmed pipe.

The three seated themselves, Brian between the two older men, and for some moments he sat, seemingly at a loss to begin.

"Think you've turned up somethin', eh?" encouraged the inspector. "It wouldn't be surprisin'—seein' the territory you cover. What was you doin' north of the lake?"

Brian started with his meeting with Seth Adams at Chipewyan, and step by step he told of his attempt to map the lake, of his answering the girl's signal smoke,

of finding Beauleau mortally wounded, of his return to the big lake for supplies, of the operation and the death of Beauleau, of Annette's escape and return to the cabin, of his own pursuit of her, and of hearing the shots that had killed Johnny Big Fish, and the voices in the cabin, of the attack on the girl, of his dashing to the door to find the body of Johnny Big Fish sprawled on the floor, and of his shooting of Colbert.

He spoke clearly and convincingly, and when he had finished it was several moments before the voice of the old inspector broke the silence. "Colbert, eh? So Thibaut Colbert's got his at last? Well—it's been a long time comin'."

"You knew him—this Colbert?" asked Brian.

"If it's the one I think it is I know him: six foot one—or two—bushy eyebrows, and shifty eyes that glitter like a snake's."

Brian nodded. "That's the man. But I never saw him before."

"This is the first time he's showed up on the rivers. He's a crook—but we've never been able to convict him. Promoted two-three fake minin' schemes, an' five-six years ago he was mixed up in a fake colonization proposition down in Saskatchewan. We nearly got him that time—murder an' robbery. Couple of Austrians drew all their money out of the bank to make land payments and were never seen alive again. If he's dead it's good riddance. I'll get the girl's story an' we'll be pullin' out in the mornin'—the quicker the better, what with the hot weather an' all. I want to look the bodies over an' then we'll bury 'em."

After supper, while the inspector talked to Annette, Brian and Father Giroux strolled down to the landing.

"What will you do, my son, when you and Sam Crane have finished your unpleasant task? Keep on exploring nameless rivers?"

"Not now, Father. What's the use of exploring a river if you don't know enough to map it? I never realized how little I knew till I tried to map that lake. That set me thinking and I know that there are a thousand things I ought to know that I don't, about rocks and—oh, about most everything, for that matter."

The kindly old eyes were beaming. "But where is the lad that stood almost on this spot scarce six months ago and scoffed at education, protesting that book learning was of no use to a man who always expected to live in the North?"

"I was a fool, Father. I thought I knew the North."

The old man smiled. "I have lived in the North more than forty years, my son, and I do not know the North. Will you be coming back to me, here at the mission?"

"No. I think I'll throw in with Seth Adams. He offered me a job and he knows the things I want to learn—the things I am interested in: geology, and botany, and surveying, and the making of maps. I do not care for history and philosophy and the affairs of the world at large. The North is my country and I want to know it." He paused and then added: "I'd like to know it better than anyone ever knew it."

"A laudable ambition, my son—and who knows but what it will be fulfilled. You are young and better fitted than anyone I know to accomplish just that. But it will mean hard work and years of study, both in school and in the field. In selecting Seth Adams as your mentor you have chosen wisely: a fine man, and a scientist of outstanding ability. I am glad you have come to

a purpose. It has grieved me to think of you merely as an aimless wanderer."

"About the girl—Annette," Brian asked awkwardly. "Can she stay on with the sisters here at the mission?"

"As long as she chooses."

"Thank you, Father. I won't forget," said the younger man. And as the sun sank behind the spruces of the opposite bank the two turned and climbed the path that led up from the river.

Chapter XIV

INSPECTOR CRANE ADVISES

FIVE days later Brian stood beside Inspector Crane and viewed the two bodies that lay side by side in the door-yard of the little cabin.

"It's him, all right," said the inspector. "The boys outside will be glad to charge him off the books. An' now suppose you show me jest how it happened."

He listened intently as Brian reënacted the scene, his keen eyes taking in the corroborative details of the tracks of Brian's pacs where he had listened beside the window and the position of the girl's rifle that lay cocked where it had fallen. "I dragged out the dead men because I didn't know how long it would be before someone would come and I didn't want to spoil the cabin."

"You done right. Your story checks with the girl's. It's plain as the nose on your face what come off here. It's too bad Johnny Big Fish had to go. He was a good Injun. You got here jest in time, son. He'd have—have broke her, or killed her to save his own neck." He prodded Colbert's body with his toe. "A damn scoundrel like him—a man could almost wish he'd have died slow!"

The remainder of the day was spent in listing the effects taken from the pockets of the dead men, and in

taking inventory, for the public administrator, of the property of Jovin Beauleau.

In the evening the two sat with their backs against banksian boles at the edge of the cliff and smoked their pipes.

"Why don't you come into the police, Brian?" asked the old inspector abruptly. "No one knows the river country better than you do. You savvy to do the right thing at the right time. An' when it comes to packin', or handlin' dogs, or canoes—I'm damned if I see yet how you come down through those rapids an' over the falls!"

"That was mostly luck."

"A lot of luck, too, but the luckiest man in the world, unless he'd be'n born in a canoe, you might say, couldn't have run those rapids an' been right side up when he hit the falls. The luck of it was in the girl's bein' where she was when you went over. A fine girl, that one. She sure spoke a piece about you."

"She hates me," answered Brian, his eyes on the far hills. "You can't blame her. I made her do what she didn't want to do." The inspector grinned at the bronze profile. "So she says," he remarked drily. "But how about joinin' the police?"

Brian shook his head slowly. "No. Seth Adams has promised me a job with the Geological Survey. You say I know the river country. The fact is, I don't know it at all. There's a thousand things I don't know—but I will know some day."

"Hell!" exploded the inspector in profane disgust, and he launched at length onto his pet aversion. "I've seen 'em work—was detailed with 'em one year! Fifteen-sixteen of 'em—seinin' minnows, countin' the scales on white fish to find out how old they was! Who gives a damn?

Who gives a damn how old a fish is—so he's big enough to eat—how many quills a porcupine's got, or what time of a year pike's teeth come loose? An' who gives a damn whether some little plant you see is a *Bohunkus bazookus*, or a *Rinopinkus hilarium*, an' how far north it grows, or don't grow, an' why? There ain't a plant, nor animal, nor fish, nor tree but what they call it out of its right name. It's like listenin' to a bunch of Dukhobors. Take that tree over there—you an' me know damn well it's spruce, but it ain't, accordin' to them. It's a *Picea Canadensis*—I remembered that one. An' when they ain't inventin' nicknames for everything they see they're off peckin' at rocks, or clawin' in the mud, or countin' the bugs in a bird's craw! I'm askin' you who gives a damn if a woodpecker eats pissants or pinchbugs, an' how many he eats to a meal? Or if a pelican swallers a fish head first or hind end first? They call it science—an' if that's the kind of stuff you want to know go to it! They can tell you how far a snail can walk backward on the third of July in latitude 58:21 an' longitude 110 at an altitude of 2,147 feet with the thermometer at 59 above zero an' a humidity of 76 an' the barometer at 29.2, allowin' for a compass variation of 14 degrees, if it's partly cloudy, an' the moon's in the third quarter. Any one of 'em can tell you all that without battin' an eye, but I'll be damned if more'n half of 'em can go to the spring for a pail of water an' get back without a policeman! I had my bellyful of wet nursin' 'em! This Adams is all right—but the crew he trains with! They can tell how many nits a louse lays an' how long it takes 'em to hatch, but they scratch all summer 'cause they don't know enough to boil their shirt when they get lousy! They can pickle a straddle bug in alcohol an'

tell you the name of his grandmother—but they couldn't fry 'em a meal of vittles if they was starvin'! It's understandin' *people* an' knowin' how to get around through a country that counts—not knowin' how many hairs a spider's got on his right hind ankle! I'd rather put in a month runnin' down a good hooch runner than ten minutes figurin' why a deer's got horns instead of wings, an' why a muskrat's got neither one! I heard 'em argue half the night about the family history of a chunk of shell one of 'em split out of a rock that had laid there a couple of million years or so, an' a storm come up an' they all went in the tent an' left their blankets layin' beside the fire."

"And you had to carry the blankets in?" chuckled Brian, who had enjoyed the tirade immensely.

"Not by a damn site I didn't! I laid there in my sleepin' bag an' snickered, an' by an' by when they'd got to where they wasn't no more'n a hundred thousand years apart on the age of the shell they got sleepy—an' was surprised as hell to find out that rain would wet blankets. Next day I did take pity on 'em an' dried their blankets, or they'd have be'n wet yet. That's what you're goin' to be up against, son, an' I hate to see a good man wasted on an outfit like that."

"But you say yourself Adams is different. And a man don't have to forget what he knows because he learns something else. They do a lot of good mapping the country and finding all about the mineral wealth and the timber——"

"Mineral wealth an' timber—hell! They don't change nothin', do they? It would be there jest the same without 'em, wouldn't it? The prospectors would find the mineral wealth an' anyone that comes along can find

the timber. The mappin' is all right. That's good practical stuff that anyone can see the need for. 'Course they ain't always accurate till they're checked up, but at that they do a mighty good job. If the government would make 'em put in all their time at that, an' maybe note down the kind of game an' fish an' timber, an' whether it was scarce or plenty, I'd be for 'em, you bet! Instead of which they waste most of their time countin' the ridges on fish scales through a microscope or tryin' to figure which end of an owl the hoot comes out of!"

"All that knowledge is valuable though," grinned Brian. "I never realized it till lately. Take that ridge over there—wouldn't you like to know why part of it is red and part gray? And why the rocks are tilted, and what formed them, and when——"

Inspector Crane interrupted with a snort. "Huh! If that ridge laid between me an' where I was goin' all I'd want to know about it is how steep it is, an' how high! If it didn't lay in my road I wouldn't even want to know that much. What the hell do I care what colour they are? A red rock ain't any easier to climb over than a gray one unless it's a littler. An' knowin' what put 'em there, an' when, an' why ain't goin' to flatten 'em down none. Studyin' *folks* is what counts—not rocks, an' birds, an' doodle bugs. But you go right ahead. I wouldn't say a word that would influence a man's decision. Learn all you can in the next five-ten years, an' when you're right sure of yourself, so you won't make no mistake about it, jest stop in to Fort Smith an' slip me the tip on how many bones in a chickadee's ear—if any. Only you won't call it a chickadee by that time. But if you'll point at the bird, an' say the name right slow, with accents on the syllables, I'll maybe get what

you're drivin' at. Who knows but what that bit of information stored away for future use might help me run down a murderer or save a bunch of starvin' Injuns?"

Brian laughed. "Thanks for the encouragement, Inspector. If I don't like my job after I get started maybe I'll quit and join the Mounted."

"Oh, you'll like it, all right," grinned the inspector. "Jest think what it would mean to be able to tell, offhand, how old a wood tick is before he loses his baby teeth!"

"What do you know about gold?" asked Brian.

"What do I know about it? Why—not much, except it's a good thing to have plenty of. I ain't speakin' from experience, though. 'Gold's where you find it,' the sayin' is. Why?"

"I was just wondering," answered Brian, his eyes on the river. "Before Beauleau died he tried to tell Annette something about gold. He could hardly talk, and before she could bring a pencil and paper he was gone. He said she must record it—but when I asked her where it was she said she did not know. She said her father had told her he had found gold and he evidently wrote his sister about it because Colbert told Annette that Beauleau's sister had sent him up to try and beat her brother out of his gold."

"She'd ought to have her neck wrung—settin' a man like Colbert against her own brother! Seems to me I've heard Colbert comes of a good family somewheres back East. If he did he was a black sheep all right—damn black! An' this here woman—Beauleau's sister—if she thinks he found gold she ain't goin' to let this killin' stop her. I'm bettin' we ain't heard the last of this yet."

"I'm wondering whether Beauleau really did find gold."

"He never showed none, did he?"

"No. Annette told me she never saw any. He may have been a little touched in the head and just imagined he had found it."

"Might have been," agreed the other. "A lot of old prospectors gets that way. I've been on the rivers a long time, now, an' I never saw any gold taken out anywhere, except a little now an' then that someone pans out of a bar somewheres—but not enough to cut any figure. I never heard of anyone even makin' wages at it. But you never can tell. Look at the Yukon. It wasn't no great shakes till Carmack made his big strike under the birch tree on Rabbit Crick. Gold's where you find it, an' I suppose it could be found around here as well as anywheres. Are you figurin' on turnin' prospector?" twitted the inspector. "An' if so, how about that chickadee's ear?"

"Oh, I'll tell you all about the chickadee's ear sometime," Brian promised. "Adams won't be back with his crew for three weeks or more and I think I'll just camp here and prospect till he comes. If Beauleau really did find gold Annette ought to have it. I've got a pan in my outfit—always carry it—and I've panned out a few ounces here and there. But as you said I never made wages at it. I'll pan some of the bars on the river and the creeks. Might as well put in my time here as hanging around the fort or the mission."

Inspector Crane grinned. "If I was a young buck I'd kind of vote for the mission myself. I didn't get my wife campin' in no graveyard pannin' for gold; nor neither by countin' the feathers in a pelican's tail. No, sir!

Every minute I was off duty I was campin' right on her old man's stoop, pesterin' her until she give in."

"Maybe she didn't hate you to start with."

"Huh! It ain't how they start—it's how they finish that counts, son. A woman that can't hate can't love, neither. But you jest go ahead an' keep away from her as much as you can, an' every couple of years or so jest slip around an' tell her how many legs a caterpillar's got, or why birds don't fly backward, an' you'll bring her around all right. She'll be crazy about you. They sure do admire for a man to know those things."

"But if I could find her father's gold . . ."

"So much the worse for you. A rich girl's goin' to have a lot more fellows taggin' around after her than a poor one—even if she is pretty as a million dollars' worth of calendars—and with plenty of money to buy clothes she'll be prettier yet. An' you off somewheres countin' the spots on a loon's egg!"

"Maybe you're right," replied Brian doggedly, as he recollected the words of the girl, "but I'm going to learn a lot more than I know now before I marry her."

"You will, all right—but you'll learn it from her, not from me nor Seth Adams."

Chapter XV

THE NEW CHIEF PACKER

In the morning after Brian had signed statements regarding the deaths of Jovin Beauleau, Johnny Big Fish, and Thibaut Colbert, Inspector Crane took his departure with a word of homely advice. "She's a fine girl—one any man could be proud of. I saw that when I talked to her. This education thing is all right, if you're hell-bent on it, but a damn poor substitute for a good woman. I'd rather have my wife than be able to call every rock an' tree an' plant an bird an' beast an' bug in Canada by the longest name there is in the dictionary! So-long."

"So-long, Inspector. If you see Kelly tell him I've signed on with Seth Adams."

Methodically, diligently, Brian explored the bars along the rivers and traversed the courses of creeks, but at no place could he find evidence of any mining operation. In vain he searched for a hidden trail that would lead to some distant creek or river. If Jovin Beauleau had found gold he had succeeded in guarding his secret well.

Panning, here and there, on the bars and along the banks of the creeks showed a few colours but nothing that would tempt a man to fill a second pan. At the end of twenty days he gave it up and struck out for the

rivers. At Chipewyan he learned that Adams had not yet returned so he went on up to the mission.

Annette greeted him from the top of the bank as he ascended the trail from the landing. "I knew that was your canoe. I have been watching it for a long time. I know the way you handle your paddle."

The blood leaped in Brian's veins as he took her hand. "How are you, Annette?" he asked. "How do you like it here?"

"It is a good place to be, Brian. They are so good to me—Sister Agatha and Father Giroux. And, Brian, they will not let me pay them any money! I am teaching the little ones French and I help Sister Agatha with the history and geography. I think it is fine to be doing some good in the world."

"The value of an education," said Brian sagely. "It is what I told you back there at the cabin."

The hazel eyes sought his in a swift glance. "But, Brian, you have given up the idea—you have come to me here?"

"Given it up!" he smiled. "Why, I haven't started it! Seth Adams hasn't come downriver yet. I am going to wait for him here." He did not note that the fire had died from the hazel eyes, nor that the brown hand had withdrawn from his own. "He's due any day now. I want you to meet him."

"I don't want to meet him!" she cried impetuously. "I hate him—and I hate you!" And abruptly she turned and fled across the tiny plateau toward the dormitory, leaving Brian O'Neill staring after her in stupid amazement.

On the screened veranda of the little cottage Father Giroux greeted Brian warmly. The keen old eyes had

taken in the little tableau, though the ears had caught nothing of the words. "And what do you think of our little Annette?" he asked. "She has proven an acquisition of value. I have not seen her like since Corporal Downey robbed us of our little Marie."

"She says she likes it here," answered Brian dully. "I think I do not know much about women."

The bright old eyes were twinkling. "Son, the man who thinks he knows women is the man who rides to a fall."

Brian, whose eyes were upon the river, straightened in his chair. "Have you a glass, Father?"

"On the wall beside the first bookcase."

Brian fixed the glass upon two dark specks that had showed around the far bend of the river. "It is Seth Adams," he said after an extended scrutiny. "It is now that I begin my education."

The old priest leaned forward and the thin, strong fingers gripped the bronzed hand. "We are going to be proud of you, son—we of the rivers."

Together the two walked down to the pier where they waited till the scows warped in the landing. Adams greeted Brian warmly. "Hello, young man! Did you map my lake?"

"I made a drawing of it. It isn't much good. Have you still got a job for me? You said, down at Chipewyan——"

"I'll find a place for you. Why do you want the job? As I remember, Leith told me you never worked unless you were broke."

"It isn't the wages I want," replied Brian seriously. "If you'll help me to know the things I want to know I'll work for nothing." His eyes on the two scows, Brian did not see the glance that passed between Adams and

Father Giroux. Nor did he know that the geologist had stopped and conferred with the aged priest on his way upriver.

"It is the awakening," whispered Father Giroux as Brian strode to the water's edge and, oblivious to the men who were picking their way across the planks that had been run ashore, stood eying the half-dozen river men who were bailing the uppermost of the two scows.

"Who's boss?" he asked of a thick-shouldered man who heaved a bucket of water outboard.

"Who wants to know?" asked a voice in his ear, and Brian turned to glance into the face of a blear-eyed, burly individual who stood at his shoulder.

"Hello, Commer," he said. "Did you bring the outfit down the river?"

"That's me, O'Neill."

"All these people, and that stuff, in a scow leaking like that?"

"Who's damn business is it if I did?"

"Mine—partly. I'm with the outfit from now on."

"Well, what you goin' to do about it?" The man bristled threateningly.

"I'll tell you in a minute," answered Brian. And, turning abruptly, he stepped to where Seth Adams and Father Giroux were standing, drinking every word of the terse dialogue.

"What's my job, Mr. Adams?" he asked.

Taken aback by the abrupt question, Adams stalled. "Why, I—I haven't given the matter any thought. What would you like it to be?"

Brian indicated, with a jerk of the thumb, Commer, who had climbed atop the pieces amidships of the scow and was profanely urging haste in the matter of bailing.

"When did that scow start leaking? I can tell you. It was just after you shot the Cascade Rapids. And he passed Fort McMurray, and McKay, and half a dozen oil camps, and never pulled in to patch it. You're lucky to be here in the shape that scow is. If Commer hadn't been drunk he'd never have ripped her bottom out at the fall. And if he hadn't been drunk ever since he'd have stopped and patched her up.

"You've got too many men and too much goods on that scow to take chances. I'd like to boss this outfit. I'm the last man in the world to try to get another man's job. Ask Father Giroux. But I can't stand by and see men's lives in danger. I hope to learn a lot of things from you. And you told me that day at Chipewyan that maybe you could learn something from me. Father Giroux knows scows and he'll tell you as I do that that scow has got no business on the river with a load in her till she gets some new planking."

Adams looked troubled. "Is it really as bad as you say? The loss of that scow would have precluded any possibility of our carrying on our summer's work."

Father Giroux smiled. "In that case, my dear Adams, I should say that the lad has proven his worth. The scow is unfit for service."

"You know the rivers?" asked Adams, turning to Brian.

Father Giroux answered for him. "None better. I can vouch for his knowledge and for his efficiency."

"All right," said Adams. "You're hired as chief packer and guide of this outfit. And I don't mind saying that I feel vastly relieved. I don't like that man Commer. But he was the only available man at the Landing."

He motioned to Commer, who swaggered down the plank to the beach.

"D'ja want me?" the man asked.

"Yes. I just wanted to tell you that from now on you'll take your orders from Mr. O'Neill."

"The hell I will!" cried the man truculently. "Ain't I boss of this outfit?"

"Not any more. You're discharged for inefficiency. I'll make out your voucher directly."

With a bellow of rage the man whirled and aimed a blow at Brian's head that the younger man was barely able to dodge. Adams stepped forward but Father Giroux laid a detaining hand on his arm and with a slight gesture indicated the twenty packers and river men—Indians, half-breeds, and whites who had ceased operations to view the impending battle. "Do not interfere," whispered the wise old priest hurriedly. "It is the way of the rivers. The lad must have his chance. If he expects to govern these he must show his fitness to govern."

"But," objected Adams, "the man is twice his size!"

A slight smile twitched the aged lips and Father Giroux shrugged. "It is the way of the rivers," he repeated, and relapsed into silence as Commer, recovering his poise from a second ponderous blow that had failed to land, was charging in on his lighter antagonist who had stepped to a level spot some six or eight feet nearer the river. Brian sidestepped the rush without apparent effort. Like a flash of light his right arm shot out and a resounding flat-hand slap that reached the ears of the farthest onlooker landed full upon the big man's face, at the same time the toe of his left pac caught the man full on the buttocks with a force

that all but sent him into the river. Brian was smiling broadly. It was a stroke of genius—this burlesquing a fight. A roar of delight, followed by guffaws of laughter, burst from the throats of the river men and packers.

Staid scientists were laughing aloud.

Again Commer charged and again that lightning-like flat-hand slap spattered blood from the man's nose. This time Brian's foot was cleverly slipped between the man's legs and he crashed heavily to the ground. Laughter ceased abruptly and cries of warning cut the air as Commer struggled to his feet, a jagged rock fragment in each hand. But Brian had no need of warning. He had seen the man's thick fingers close upon the weapons. One leap, and as Commer's arm drew back to hurl the rock Brian struck twice—no flat-hand slaps these, but good honest blows of doubled fists driven by muscles hard as steel and trained to do the bidding of an alert brain. One landed on the jaw and the other in the middle of the thick paunch. The rocks clattered from the man's hands to the loose stones of the beach. Commer stood very still, his eyes glassy, his mouth sagging open. Then the huge body weaved slightly as the knees sagged beneath it and very abruptly, and very heavily, the man sat down among the rock fragments. Slowly, clumsily, as in a daze a thick hand rose and brushed at the face as though to remove an obstruction from before the eyes. Thick fingers fumbled and prodded at the sagging jaw and came to rest there, as though to prop the damaged member into place. Then amid the renewed howls and shouts of derision from the river men Commer began to cry. Loudly and unashamed, he blubbered and squalled, while in English, French, and jargon the delighted river men hurled jests

and phrases of obscene contempt. Brian turned away in disgust and, stepping to the water's edge, addressed the men who were crowding the rails of the scows.

"I'm boss—Brian O'Neill. Any of Commer's friends that want to quit can quit now."

A big Frenchman grinned broadly as his eyes swept his fellows. "By Goss, she ain' got no frien's! She wan beeg leetle puppy—she ain' even de dog! She cry lak de leetle girl w'at burn de finger. By Goss, I'm t'ink we lak we work for you."

"All right then. Get to work, now—all of you—and unload that leaking scow. Careful with those pieces—pile them out of the way and cover them with tarps. We've got to haul the scow out and get some planking into her."

As the men sprang to obey Brian turned to Father Giroux. "Got any planking here, Father? I won't know how much it will take till I've had a look at her bottom."

"There may be some. If not you can rip some out. There are a few logs at the mill."

"How long will the repairs take?" asked Adams.

"Can't tell till I've looked her over. With good luck I'll have her on skids by supper time. Ought to get her launched again by to-morrow noon. We'll run the sawmill to-night, if we have to. I've got to rig a windlass."

"There's a winch in the storehouse," said the priest.

"Good! That will save time." He turned to the big Frenchman who had acted as spokesman. "Here, Frenchy, take a couple of men and cut about four good poles for skids, then float them down here—and don't let 'em rot on the way!"

The big fellow grinned and a moment later was moving rapidly up the shore with his ax men.

Brian turned to find himself confronted by the cook. "Me—I'm got to git helper to git my stove ashore—my keetchin. De suppaire—she no good, she be late!"

"Right!" answered Brian, and told off a man.

As he started up the bank Adams accosted him. "I'll introduce you to the others now—the members of the party."

Brian smiled. "They'll have to wait," he said. "I've got to get up to the mill to see about that planking. An' there's the winch to drag down and rig."

Adams nodded. "You're right. You can meet them at supper."

A tall, thin man stepped up—a man who wore thick glasses and spoke disagreeably through his nose. "Dr. Adams, is this young man, may I ask, to be the new chief packer?"

"He is. O'Neill, this is Professor Beggs, the entomologist of the expedition."

"Ah, yes, quite so," squeaked the nasal one. "And now, my good man, if we are to spend the night here may I ask that you get the tents pitched?"

"What tents?" asked Brian with a glance toward the cloudless sky.

"Why, the sleeping tents, to be sure. I feel drowsy and desire to take a nap. When will you have them ready?"

"The first rainy night."

"But," gasped the other, "you do not expect us to sleep out like beasts!"

"No. Like men," answered Brian curtly, and he strode up the trail, leaving Professor Beggs goggling through his thick glasses.

Chapter XVI

COMMER STRIKES

THAT night for the first time since leaving the Landing there were no tents pitched. Nor did Brian meet the scientists of the party at supper. He was at the sawmill with a crew of river men, ripping out planking for the scow. And as fast as it was ripped out it was packed to the river, where hammers and saws sounded until the belated darkness called a halt on the activity. At two o'clock in the morning they were at it again, and at ten the damaged scow was in the river, right and tight, with her cargo stowed.

It was Rawley, the cartographer, youngest member of the scientific party, who voiced the general sentiment of the survey. He it was who had stood close beside Seth Adams the better to see the fight, and had overheard Brian's terse reply to Professor Beggs. "By God!" he confided as he rejoined the group that had watched from a distance. "This chap's no roughneck! He floored Old Buggs with his brain as neatly as he did this Commer person with his fists! I'm for him. He knows his apples. We'd have been in a hell of a fix if that scow had sunk!"

And Seth Adams himself, as he sat and smoked on the little veranda with Father Giroux and listened to the sound of the hammers, said: "This young O'Neill—I hesitated at first on account of his age, but it seems I've made no mistake."

"No mistake, I assure you," answered the aged priest, whose word was law upon the rivers. "I have known the lad since infancy. I have known his father, Kelly O'Neill, since I have been in the country. The Company never had a better man than Kelly O'Neill." The old man paused and a touch of wistfulness crept into his voice which Adams was quick to note. "The lad talked to me here after you had gone upriver. All my life I have spent in trying to understand my people. Young Brian has interested me as few have—he has a brain. Yet I have never been able to get close to him. He comes—and he goes. His attitude toward education has been one of tolerant cynicism. He is an apt student —but professes a contempt for what he chooses to call 'book learning.' His interest seems to be all in roaming the country, in seeing things he has not seen before. Then he met you. And in one short conversation you have captured that which I have never been able to capture—his imagination! Tell me how you do that, my friend. You, who care only for rocks, and for prying into the secrets of God—how do you reach the heart of a man for whose heart I have been reaching for years, and have failed?"

Seth Adams frowned. "And where would I have been, Father, had you not paved the way? It was you, and possibly his father, who awakened his intellect. Who else in the North would have been keen for mapping a lake? Who else would have given our short conversation a second thought? Brains travel in grooves, Father—his and mine in the same, maybe. I'll know by the end of the summer."

The old priest smiled as he puffed at his long-stemmed pipe. "It is thus with the world—with the humble and,

I suppose, with the great of the world—that which we strive for is that which we do not attain."

"Damned rot! Father Giroux, I've known you for a dozen years. I know something of your work on the rivers. I know what men like Old Man Downey and David Gaunt say about you. Your work will be felt for a thousand years in the North! Mine will be overridden by the next generation!"

"I appreciate that from the lips of a man I can believe means it. More of condemnation than of praise comes to my lot. But I know what I know—and I do what I do."

"And you do aplenty! Come, Father Giroux, have I got a scientist, or only a damned good packer?"

"You have a good packer. You also have a brain which only you have been able to appeal to. I leave the lad in good hands."

"He'll have his chance," said Adams, and to the sound of the tapping of hammers the two sought their beds.

Just before the scows were cast off the following morning the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer *Grahame* nosed in at the landing on her way upriver, and being short-handed, the captain was glad to hire Commer, who went aboard amid the hilarious jibes of the river men.

Later as Brian paused to speak to the big Frenchman, who manned the long steering sweep of the leading scow, the latter gave him warning. "Dat damn good t'ing you look out for Commer. She ain' fergit. If you lick um good—she fergit dat. But not w'en you mak' de fool. She got de bad eye. Mebbeso, som'tam she keel you."

Brian laughed. "Oh, Commer's harmless. He don't want any of my meat."

"*Oui*, but w'en she com' 'roun' dat bes' you keep de one eye in de back of de head."

At the mouth of the Athabaska the outfit tied up to await the return of the *Grahame*, which was to tow the scows across the lake to Fort Chipewyan, where Adams had decided to establish a permanent camp.

It was during this week in which they awaited the return of the *Grahame* that a new world was opened to Brian O'Neill. For the scientists were not idle. Each in his own province was busy collecting specimens, and the laboratory tent with its dissecting instruments, its microscopes, and its chemicals proved a veritable wonder palace to the lad whose duties during the tie-up were almost negligible. No plant, nor insect, nor bird, nor mammal was too small, nor too insignificant, to come in for its share of meticulous observation.

Where, to Inspector Sam Crane, these investigations were the butt of tolerant ridicule, to Brian they were of absorbing interest. Early and late the lad worked, accompanying members into the field, or haunting the laboratory to watch with a consuming interest each move that was made. So great was his zeal that even Old Buggs, as Professor Beggs was irreverently referred to by the younger members of the party, unbent and favoured him with an illuminating, if somewhat abstruse, dissertation upon the life cycle of the Lepidoptera.

One evening Seth Adams came upon the lad seated upon a rock, staring out over the lake. "Well, have you decided which branch you want to devote your life to?" he asked with a smile.

"I'd like to know about them all," Brian answered.

"So would all of us. But unfortunately, my boy, life is not long enough. If a man is going to really get anywhere he must specialize."

"I'll take the rocks, then," answered Brian unhesitatingly. "But I want to learn how to make maps."

"You'll learn that of necessity. Father Giroux tells me he has coached you through algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. How would you like to go to college this fall?"

Light leaped into the younger man's eyes and as quickly died. "Not this fall," he answered heavily. "I have no money. But sometime I am going."

Seth Adams smiled. "I think I can manage that. You are on my payroll at five dollars a day and we will be out until October. Then it so happens that I have a certain influence here and there. Any recommendation of mine would be almost certain to be acted upon. If you care to go I think we can consider the matter settled."

Brian's voice was not quite steady as he answered: "I'll go. And sometime I'll pay you back."

"There'll be no paying back to do, son. Canada needs men like you—and she doesn't need them for guides and packers!"

A permanent camp was established just west of the Roman Catholic mission at Fort Chipewyan and the outfit divided into two expeditionary forces, the one under Adams to explore the Lake Claire and lower Peace River country for minerals, and the other, and larger party, under cartographer Rawley, to explore and map the Tazin Lake country and report on the fauna and flora of the north shore.

Brian, with half a dozen canoe men and packers,

accompanied the Adams expedition, and it was while talking with the kindly scientist in field trips and during the long evenings that he came to realize the enormousness of the task that lay before him in the mastery of his chosen science. Adams took delight in disclosing an illuminating glimpse here or there of what geology really meant in anything like a basic understanding of the Northland; and being that rarest of humans, a real scientist who could present his subject in terms understandable and of interest to a layman, he impressed the lad, whetted his appetite without discouraging him.

After a month in the field the outfit returned to the base camp where Brian spent the afternoon helping Adams in the labelling and boxing of specimens.

Toward evening a long whistle announced the arrival of the *Grahame* on a trip upriver, and, after she had warped to, Brian strolled up to the Company post. He encountered Commer in the doorway, evidently a little the worse for liquor.

"How about givin' me a job?" asked the man truculently. "You took mine an' it ain't no more'n right you give me one—even if it's only packin'."

"I thought you were on the *Grahame*."

"I am, but steamboatin's too damn hard work."

"Packing is hard work, too. We don't need any loafers."

"Is that so! I'll loaf you—you——!" He ripped out a vile name and Brian halted him.

"That will be about all, Commer," he said. "I can knock hell out of you with my two fists any time I try—and you know it. If you use anything else—well, I don't want to kill you. Just think it over."

Commer stepped into the trading room and, hearing

footsteps, Brian turned to face Annette Beauleau. The girl noted the swift lighting of his eyes.

"Annette," he cried, "I didn't know you were here! You didn't get off the *Grahame*."

Neither noticed that Commer had halted out of sight just within the door. "No," she answered, "Father Giroux and I have been staying at the mission here, waiting for the boat. We are going back on her. She leaves at daylight in the morning. We came here because there were some papers to be signed so I could get the money that Mr. Leith would have paid to my father. And I have it right here in my pocket—five hundred dollars—and now I have more than six hundred dollars, and that is a great deal of money. And twice each year I will get five hundred more, as my father used to do."

"That's fine! But what are you going to do with it all? You say they won't let you pay anything at the mission."

Impulsively the girl stepped closer. "Do you know what I want to do with it? What I should like to do?"

"No."

"I should like to buy supplies with it. Then we could be married right here and go back to the cabin! Then, Brian, we could live, and love, and you would never have to trap, or to work on the rivers. For I do love you—and I know that you love me, even if you do want an education. I do not want to go back to the mission. I want you! I have tried hard to hate you, but I cannot, and when you are gone I am unhappy. It is my pride that hates—while my heart loves."

Others were coming toward the trading room, from the camp and from the *Grahame*, and Brian interrupted

her. "Wait, Annette—we cannot talk here. I must go back for there are boxes of things to go outside on the *Grahame*. Listen. As soon as it is dark I will meet you up on the point—and there we can talk!"

She hesitated, then nodded assent. "I will come. But I must not let Father Giroux know. He might be very angry. We sleep on the boat to-night and when the light goes out in his little room I will come." As the men approached she stepped into the trading room and he hastened to the camp.

Darkness had settled before Brian quitted the camp and proceeded along the rocky beach toward the point beyond the extreme eastern edge of the little settlement. No light showed from the mission, nor from the houses, nor from the tepees of the Indians, nor from the Hudson's Bay Company's buildings of squared logs that gleamed whitely in the starlight. He paused beside the *Grahame*, warped close against the bank, noted that her gangplank had not been pulled up, and that lights showed dimly from two or three of the cabin windows. Then he passed on into the darkness toward the point, a quarter of a mile distant.

And from his place of concealment among the boxes and bales of the forward deck Commer scowled evilly as his hairy hand tightened its grip on a short section of iron pipe. With his other hand he reached for a bottle and rasped the raw liquor from his throat with a curse. "He will take my job an' make a fool out of me, will he? An' five-six hundred dollars! By God, I'll git 'em both! She's good an' deep off'n them rocks an' that old iron pulley lays right there handy. They won't neither one of 'em ever come up."

A half hour passed. The lights in the cabins were

extinguished. Light footsteps sounded on the deck and, pausing for a moment at the head of the gangplank, Annette passed swiftly ashore. Gripping his piece of pipe, and catching up a length of light line, Commer followed.

The moment Commer stepped ashore he realized he had made a mistake in removing his shoes. The rocks hurt his feet. By the thin light of the stars he could see the girl hurrying toward the trysting place, nearly a quarter of a mile away.

Stifling his curses, Commer redoubled his effort, for he was minded to deal with the girl swiftly and finally midway between the *Grahame* and the rocky point. Later he could deal with Brian, who he knew would be unarmed and would make no outcry. But try as he would, he could not gain on her. The beach rubble tore and bruised his feet, while she seemed to pass over it as swiftly and smoothly as though she traversed a pavement. She had passed the midway point when fortune favoured Commer. The loose rubble gave place to solid rock and, gripping his pipe, he ran noiselessly, rapidly closing the gap that separated him from his quarry. Ten yards—five—two. He raised the pipe for a crushing blow. Then his gods played him false. His eyes on Annette's head, he stepped into a narrow fissure and fell heavily forward. The iron pipe flying from his hand rang sharply on the hard rock at the feet of the girl, who turned with a sharp cry of terror as Commer scrambled cursing to his feet.

The next instant he was upon her. A scream was stifled as thick fingers closed with crushing force upon her throat.

Chapter XVII

INSPECTOR CRANE MAKES AN ARREST

BRIAN O'NEILL reached the rocky point, seated himself, and filled his pipe. For a long time he sat thinking, his eyes on the dull squares of light that were the cabin windows of the *Grahame*. When the last square disappeared he knocked the ashes from his pipe and rose to his feet. "She'll be coming now," he muttered as he walked slowly to meet the girl who had promised to join him after Father Giroux had retired.

His heartbeats quickened as he caught a momentary glimpse of her in the dim starlight, far ahead, where the rubble beach gave place to hard rock. Then through the night silence came the sharp ring of metal on rock, a short scream of fright, a stifled cry. A blur of motion caught his eye as he plunged forward.

It seemed that minutes passed as he sped toward the spot, his eyes on the uneven surface of the rock—and then two figures loomed in the starlight, Annette struggling, beating futilely against the thick body of a man whose two hands had closed about her throat. Brian got a fleeting glimpse into a face distorted by hate, as his fist crashed against Commer's jaw. Again he struck, and again. The girl was free now—staggering back, her hands fumbling at her throat, her eyes wide, staring. Then Commer was lunging toward him, his heavy arms flailing clumsily. Blind fury seized Brian

as he struck with everything that was in him. So fast and furiously he rained his blows that the huge man, leaning toward him, had no chance to fall.

He stepped back and the man dropped like a polled ox, his head striking the rock with an audible thud. Then the thick body, its face smeared with blood, rolled heavily down the sloping face of the rock and brought up with arms and legs grotesquely twisted against an upstanding fragment not ten feet from the water's edge.

Without even a glance at Commer Brian turned to the girl, whose breath was coming in great gasping sobs. "Are you hurt? What happened?"

"No—I am all right. He tried to choke me. I heard a noise as something struck the rocks. I cried out and turned and he was scrambling to his feet, and before I could cry again he had me by the throat. I know he hated you. I was going to warn you. I heard them talking on the boat. They all laughed at him for what you did at the mission. But why should he attack me?"

Brian shook his head. "I don't know, Annette, unless he guessed, somehow, that I love you—and it was the surest and the safest way to strike at me." He paused suddenly. "Did he know that you had that money you got from Leith?"

"No. How could he know? Mr. Leith gave me the money this afternoon before the *Grahame* came in. There was nobody in the store at the time except Father Giroux and Inspector Crane."

Brian looked thoughtful. "I was talking to him in the doorway of the trading room just before you came along," he said. "It may be that he stepped inside and overheard you tell me that you had the money in your pocket. You didn't speak of it on the boat?"

"No, I went straight to my room and lay on the bed till Father Giroux's light went out, and then I came here. And, oh, Brian—now Father Giroux will know that I came out in the night to meet you and he will be very angry. I do not want him to be angry. He has been so good to me."

"He need not know. You can slip back onto the boat and he will never know you left your cabin."

The girl glanced with a shudder toward the still form crumpled against the rock fragment. "But how about him? They will see he's all bloody, and——"

"You need not fear him," interrupted Brian. "No matter what kind of a story he will invent to explain his condition he will never dare to bring your name into it. Men who attack women do not live long on the rivers."

The girl glanced nervously toward the *Grahame*, whose white-painted hull showed silent and dim and ghostly in the starlight. "I must go back. I am afraid. Tell me, Brian, shall we be married—now—to-morrow—and go back and live in the cabin?"

"No, Annette," he answered gently. "When I have learned what I must learn, then we will be married. When you think it over you will know that I am right. I could not make much money trapping and I will not live on yours. In the fall I am going to a college and when I have learned what they can teach me I will come back."

"You need not come back on my account," answered the girl dully. "I will never marry you. When you go outside you can forget Annette Beauleau. And I will forget that Brian O'Neill ever lived."

Abruptly she turned, and in silence Brian watched until her form merged into the dim starlight. There

was a cold finality in this parting—different from those in which her sudden anger had flared. He could never forget Annette Beauleau. But were women like that? Could she forget that Brian O'Neill ever lived?

Without so much as a glance at Commer he made his way slowly toward the camp. On the bank opposite the *Grahame* he halted. Idly he wondered which of the darkened little windows was hers. "Good-bye, Annette," he whispered. "Maybe sometime you'll know that when a man starts out to do a thing he's got to do it, or else—or else——" His brain groped for the alternative, and in a chaos of conflicting thoughts he made his way to the camp and slipped beneath his blankets.

Brian was awakened at daylight by a hand on his shoulder. He looked up sleepily into the face of the captain of the *Grahame*. "You bossin' the packers of this outfit?" he asked.

Brian nodded. The man had evidently come from the Hudson's Bay Company store, for the door stood open and light streamed out.

"Did you give Commer a job?"

"No."

"Leith said he heard him ask for one but he thought you turned him down."

"I did."

"Where in hell is he then? Here it is time to pull out—an' me short-handed! Damn him! I was goin' to fire him at McMurray anyhow. He's too lazy to live."

"If you can't find him you might get an Injun to work as far as McMurray. Amos Clawhammer's a good hand. He might like the job."

The captain returned to the store, muttering malediction upon the head of the missing Commer, and a

half-hour later a long-drawn whistle blast announced the departure of the *Grahame*. Raising himself on his elbow, Brian watched the vessel until it disappeared around the point. A cold drizzle set in and, pulling the tarp over his head, he slept till the call of the cook roused the camp to activity.

Brian stepped from the grub tent to see Inspector Crane approaching from the direction of the Hudson's Bay Company store. He waited, a smile on his face.

"Hello, Inspector! I don't know about that chickadee's ear yet, but I can tell you——"

"There's several things you can tell me," interrupted the officer, and Brian was quick to note that the stern lips were not smiling. "Where's Commer?" asked the inspector abruptly, his keen eyes on the younger man's face.

Brian shrugged. "I don't know—and I don't give a damn."

Others were emerging from the grub tent, and, motioning Brian to follow, the officer led the way toward the store. "Did you see him last night?" he asked as Brian fell in beside him.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Up toward the point."

"What time of night?"

"I don't know."

"Was it dark?"

"Yes, except for the starlight."

"What were you doing up there in the opposite direction from camp at that time of night?"

"That's my business."

The Inspector stopped dead in his tracks and faced

Brian as a slow flush of anger reddened his cheeks. It was not often that men handed Sam Crane a short answer. "You'll find out that it's my business, too, before you're through with this. When Cap Moss asked you where Commer was this mornin', why didn't you tell him he was dead? An' why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know it."

"Didn't know it! Well, who in hell killed him, if you didn't? You've admitted you seen him last night right at the place where his body's layin' now. Leith heard you tell him yesterday in the doorway of the store that you could knock hell out of him with your fists any time you wanted to, but that you didn't want to kill him. Did you say that—or didn't you?"

"I did."

"What did you kill him for then, if you didn't want to?"

"Maybe I changed my mind."

"You admit killin' him, then?"

"I don't admit anything."

"You might as well admit it. You admit seein' him late last night right where his body is, an' you was heard to threaten him. No one seen him since till an Injun kid come runnin' up to the store half an hour ago an' said there was a dead man layin' down by the river. It was a bunglin' job, Brian. Why didn't you finish it like you started out to do an' slip him in the river with a rock tied to him, instead of droppin' the line an' beatin' it? You might of known the first person that come along would find him."

"I didn't care," answered Brian indifferently.

The inspector shook his head thoughtfully, his eyes on the lad's face. "I don't understand you. I've heard

of such cases, but I don't know as I ever seen one before —a good man turned killer. When you killed Colbert you done right. I ain't sayin', yet, that you didn't do right when you killed Commer. If you'd come out an' talk, man to man, we'd soon get the straight of it—but you don't. If you done it in self-defense, or in defense of someone else, why in hell don't you come out with it? If you done it just because the killin' of Colbert give you a taste for killin', by God I'll see that you go where you won't kill no one else, unless it's a guard!"

"It wasn't in self-defense. No one else was there. And I don't like to kill people."

"What did you hit him with?"

"My fists."

"Fists—hell! I suppose you made that smallish, jagged hole in his temple with your fist, eh? You hit him with a chunk of rock—that's what you hit him with!"

Brian smiled. "You're guessing now, inspector—and you're guessing wrong."

"We'll go down an' look him over," said Sam Crane, and he changed the course from the store toward the little group of whites and Indians that stood at the top of the slope, having been warned to approach no nearer the body.

As the group parted to allow the two to pass, several spoke to Brian, who returned their greetings gravely. The body lay as he had last seen it in the pale starlight, lodged against the rock fragment near the water. Higher up the sloping rock lay a coil of light line. Nothing else was in evidence. Stooping beside the body, Inspector Crane pointed to a wound in the right temple from which blood had flowed and dried. "You can feel the

busted skull with your fingers," he said. "Now I'll leave it to you—was it a fist, or a chunk of rock that done it?"

"Did you find the chunk?" asked Brian.

"No, I didn't. But you could have throwed it away, or it could have slid past him into the river."

"Or I could have knocked him down with my fist and his head could have hit the rock," supplemented the lad.

"Might have," admitted the inspector. "Only, he'd have had to fall damned hard."

"He did—damned hard."

"What was your idea in bringin' along the line, if you didn't figure to kill him?"

"I never saw that line before," answered Brian, and he smiled grimly as he pointed to a dark stain on the dead man's hand. "Score one for the defense, Inspector. See that splotch of tar on Commer's hand? Then look at the line. I believe it came off the *Grahame*. Commer must have brought it with him, though I didn't see it in his hand."

"Guess you're right," admitted the officer. "But what in hell would he be doin' here in the middle of the night, without no shoes on an' carryin' a line? You say he didn't attack you—that it wasn't in self-defense. An' what was you doin' here?"

"I've got a right to be wherever I want to be at any time of night," answered Brian. "And I've got a right to knock hell out of Commer any time I want to. You better search my outfit. Maybe I killed him for his shoes."

"Knockin' hell out of an' killin' is two different things. If it wasn't in self-defense it looks a whole lot like mur-

der. I'm goin' to have to arrest you, Brian, till I can clear this thing up. An' if you don't come acrost to the judge better'n what you have to me you stand a good show of conviction."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Headquarters," growled the inspector. "An' we start now."

In vain Seth Adams tried to remonstrate with the inspector, and Professor Beggs, who was a man of independent means, came forward in the lad's defense.

"If I may be permitted," he twanged through his nose, "I will gladly put up bail or furnish bond for the young man's appearance when wanted in any sum you may name. It is preposterous to think that he would commit a wilful murder. If he killed this man he no doubt had good reason."

"I ain't authorized to fix, or to accept, either bail or bond. An' if he had a good reason he's been damned careful not to give it out."

"Ba Goss," exclaimed the big Frenchman, "dat Commer she got de bad eye! Me, I'm tell Brian O'Neill she got to look out. Commer sneak up an' keel um som'tam' for mak' de fool down to de mission!"

"So he killed Commer first?" ventured the inspector.

"Dat damn good t'ing Commer dead. Dat be damn good t'ing if he's mudder t'row um against de wall w'en she was born. She no good, dat Commer, an' som'tam' she keel Brian O'Neill."

Chapter XVIII

VINDICATION

After the burial of Commer Leith offered to run them across to the mouth of the river in the motorboat, and as they ploughed through the chop the old Scot addressed Brian. "I hae nae doot ye kilt Commer, lad, an' I ha nae doot ye had reason. I heard what he called ye yesterday an' I heard ye tell him ye dinna want to kill him. An' I took heed to the look in his een as he stood clost beside the door whilst ye talked to the lass o' Beauleau's. But I donna like yer attitude i' the matter. If ye've naething to conceal why don't ye come oot i' the open an' tell Sam Crane all aboot it? Instead of which ye'll be settin' the law at defiance. 'Tis a course will mak' ye more enemies than friends."

"You say he stood close beside the door and listened to the talk that passed between Annette and me?" asked Brian.

"Aye. But if he attacked ye, lad, why don't ye come oot wi' it? The law recognizes a mon's right to kill in self-defense."

"He didn't attack me," answered Brian. "And I've said all I'm going to say."

On the river that evening over the little camp fire Inspector Crane tried again. "Look here, Brian—I know you killed Commer, whether you admit it or not. But I'm like the rest of 'em—I believe you had good reason.

I believe you've told the truth when you said you knocked him down with your fist and his head struck the rock. But unless you can show good reason for knocking him down it don't help your case, except to make it second-degree murder, or manslaughter—and either one carries a long stretch on conviction. You don't want to go to the pen and I don't want to see you go. I've always been a friend of yours, haven't I?"

"Sure."

"Then why can't you come out an' tell me jest what happened? If you're goin' to put up a defense at the trial why not put it up now, an' save me the expense an' the trouble of takin' you clean up to Edmonton? If you can show good reason for killin' Commer I'll turn you loose right now."

"I've said all I'm going to say—now or at the trial," answered the lad doggedly. "You've arrested me and you've got to prove me guilty or else I'll be acquitted. I won't tell you one story and the judge another, Inspector, and you know it."

Next day, as they approached the landing at Father Giroux's mission, Inspector Crane, who was paddling the stern, swung the canoe toward shore.

Brian ceased paddling and looked around. "What are you stopping here for?" he inquired sharply.

"That's my business," answered the inspector curtly, and Brian picked up his paddle.

The genial old priest greeted them warmly, and Brian saw, as they gained the top of the bank, that Sister Agatha and Annette were standing near by watching some children at play. Annette took no apparent notice of their passing and the three seated themselves on the veranda where the inspector told of what had happened

at Fort Chipewyan, while Father Giroux smoked his long-stemmed pipe in silence.

When the officer had finished the aged priest cleared his throat. "And you believe that a murder has been done?"

"Well, not murder, maybe, but with him keepin' his mouth shut it looks like second-degree murder, or manslaughter——"

"Or a justifiable homicide," interrupted Father Giroux gravely. "Such homicides are recognized by the laws of God and of man."

"Why don't he justify, then?"

"He may have a reason. The lad is no murderer. Upon that I would stake my life." He turned to Brian. "Is there anything you would say to me, my son?"

"Nothing, Father, except what I have told the inspector. I attacked him with my fists and knocked him down. It seems that his head struck a rock and he is dead. That is all I have to say."

"We'll be goin' then," said the inspector gruffly. "I thought maybe he'd talk to you."

Brian kept his eyes straight to the front as he preceded the inspector down the path. He did not note that Annette was staring in surprise at the early departure. But the stare was not lost upon the veteran officer, who took good care that the girl saw that his service revolver was trained upon Brian's back.

As the two disappeared over the edge of the bank the girl hastened to the side of the aged priest, who stood on the bluff watching the departure. "What is the matter, Father Giroux?" she asked. "Where are they going?"

The priest turned a sombre face toward her as he answered in a heavy voice: "To Edmonton. Inspector Crane has arrested Brian for the murder of the man Commer."

"Murder!" cried the girl in a voice that was a husky whisper. "Oh, when did he kill him? And why?"

"Sometime during the night that the *Grahame* was tied up at Chipewyan. You and I must have been aboard and asleep at the time. Yesterday morning an Indian child found the body wedged against a rock close beside the river. Brian will say nothing except that he attacked the man with his fists and that his head may have struck the rocks in falling. He will give no explanation for his act, although the inspector has given him all the chance in the world to justify it as self defense——"

"It wasn't in self-defense!" cried the girl. "It was in defense of me!"

"But—my daughter——"

The words fell upon thin air, for already the girl was halfway down the steep trail, calling and gesticulating to the occupants of the canoe, which was already breasting the current. The canoe turned shoreward as the girl reached the water's edge, and Sam Crane masked a grin with a look of stern annoyance.

Father Giroux reached the girl's side as the canoe beached, but she paid him no heed. The words rushed from her lips in a torrent as she addressed Inspector Crane.

"It wasn't murder! He fought him because he attacked me! He had me by the throat and was choking me when Brian came—and he fought him and the man let go, and then Brian struck him again and again so

fast that I could not tell how many times, and the man fell and his head struck the rock—I heard it strike, and as he rolled over I saw the blood spurt from his temple!"

"But—my daughter," interrupted the priest, a puzzled frown upon his face. "Why were you ashore in the middle of the night? And why should the man attack you? And how did it come that Brian was near at hand at the time?"

A deep flush suffused the cheeks that had gone pale beneath their tan as Annette answered in a tone half penitent, half defiant: "I went ashore to meet Brian. We wanted to talk and there had been no chance. We talked for a few minutes at the door of the store but there were others about and Brian had to go and help with the packing of some things that were being shipped on the *Grahame*. We agreed to meet on the point and to talk there under the stars. I was afraid you would not approve and I did not want to make you angry. You have always been so good to me. So I waited until you put out your light and then I started for the point. When I had nearly reached it something iron rang on the rocks and I screamed and turned to see that so horrible man scrambling to his feet, and before I could run he had me by the throat, and then Brian came."

"But why should he attack you?"

"I think I can answer that," said Brian. "Leith told me that Commer stood just inside the door and listened while Annette and I talked. She told me of the money that Leith had paid over to her—said she had it in her pocket. I believe that Commer figured on killing Annette and finishing me off afterward. I believe he was just about to strike her over the head with some sort

of an iron weapon when somehow he fell, for I heard the ring of metal on the rock from where I was but I didn't see any weapon."

"I did," said Inspector Crane, and, fumbling in his pack, he produced a piece of iron pipe about eighteen inches long. "It's a length of the steam fittin' off the *Grahame*. Brian's got the right dope. The damned scoundrel figured on killin' her and then him, an' he'd have sunk 'em both in the river. That's why he carried the line." He turned to the girl with a grim smile. "I found this, too. Maybe you know who it belongs to." He extended a crumpled handkerchief adorned with a hand-worked border. "I didn't figure it belonged to Commer. Of course I know it might be Brian's—since he's turned scientist there ain't no tellin' what he'd be packin' around. That might be some contraption for strainin' owl's milk, or determinin' the dark of the moon."

Brian was staring at the inspector in astonishment. "But if you had the pipe, and knew where it came from—and the handkerchief, and knew whose it was—why in the devil did you arrest me?"

The inspector was grinning broadly now as he laid an arm affectionately across Brian's shoulders. "As soon as I looked the ground over after that Injun kid found the body I figured out what happened. Except that I did figure you had busted him with a chunk of rock. I wanted the chunk, so I pulled off my clothes an' done a bit of divin', figurin' that you'd dropped the rock an' it had slid into the water. I didn't find no rock but I did find the piece of pipe. The rest was easy, after I found the handkerchief. I went to you merely to get the story first hand.

"When you refused to talk I tumbled right away to the reason. You figured someone might think ill of you an' the girl meetin' together out there in the night. That's where you was wrong—wasn't he, Father Giroux? No one that knows either one of you would have given it a thought. Lord, boy, young folks has been doin' jest that thing since the world started—ain't they, Father Giroux? An' it's all right an' proper.

"So then I played my own game. I seen the chance to find out just how much guts you've got. I give you every inducement to lie out of it by callin' it self-defense, an' I brought all the pressure I could on you to make you tell what really come off. But you wouldn't lie, an' you wouldn't tell the truth an' bring the lady's name into it, even though you knew you stood a good chance of doin' a long stretch in the pen. An' that's what I call a man! The reason I done it is because I know damn well that sometime you'll come into the police. We need men—men with guts like yours. You ain't goin' to be satisfied piddlin' around all your life countin' bees eggs, or figurin' why a snake crawls on his belly an' a louse on a man's.

"So I arrested you an' brought you up here so's to give the lady her chance. A policeman's wife has got to have jest as much guts as her husband. If she'd have shut up, an' let me take you on to save herself, she wouldn't have been——" He paused abruptly and stared in astonishment at the girl, who had turned and fled and was already halfway up the bank.

Brian cast an inquiring glance toward Father Giroux, whose face lighted with a benign smile. "Be at peace, my son. You two young people erred only in not giving me credit for a deeper understanding."

Chapter XIX

BRIAN GOES OUTSIDE

Inspector Crane proceeded on upriver and Brian rejoined his outfit, much to the delight of Seth Adams, who immediately organized a party to explore the buffalo country lying between the Peace and the Salt rivers. During the month of exploration Brian proved his worth as a guide and tracker. The boundaries of the range of the all but vanished race were definitely located, some seventy-five animals were seen, some excellent photographs taken, and Adams secured one typical specimen for preservation.

Returning to the base camp, they spent ten days in preparing and boxing the various specimens of minerals, flora, and fauna, and when the *Grahame* pulled in on her last trip south the outfit took passage to Fort McMurray with the season's work behind them.

Repairs to machinery necessitated a two-hour tie-up at the mission of Father Giroux, where the aged priest again commended Brian upon his determination to go to college and gave the lad much wise and pertinent advice.

Brian listened respectfully, if a bit impatiently, and when the other lapsed into silence he asked abruptly: "Where is Annette?"

Father Giroux smiled indulgently. "It is thus with youth—and it is well. Step across to the dormitory. She will be there."

At the door of the large building Brian met Sister Agatha and the sweet-faced gray nun smiled at the eagerness with which he asked for Annette. She disappeared within the building and when she returned a few minutes later her face wore a look of concern. "She says she cannot see you. She is busy."

"Busy! Tell her——" He paused abruptly, and stood for a moment quite still as Sister Agatha watched his cheeks pale perceptibly, then flush red beneath the mahogany tan. "No matter," he said stiffly. "I am sorry to have troubled you. I'll be going now. Goodbye." And turning he walked across the tiny plateau that was the playground of the children and disappeared down the steep trail to the river.

On his little veranda Father Giroux noted the departure and frowned. "If she knew that it would be many, many moons before she will see him again she would not have refused. She is a headstrong girl—mayhap the lesson will do her good."

Brian sought a quiet spot on the deck and smoked, with his feet on the rail, until the throbbing of the engine, the long whistle blast, and the casting off of lines announced the departure of the *Grahame*.

In her room Annette, too, heard the whistle blast, and its sound brought her to the window at a bound. Smoke from the boat's funnel was drifting across the playground, and presently, beyond the rim of the bluff, she saw the *Grahame* nosing her way into midstream. In a panic she dashed down the stairs and hurried to the cottage of Father Giroux. "Where has he gone?" she asked in a voice high-pitched with anxiety.

For answer the priest pointed a long, lean finger toward the vanishing steamboat.

"But," cried the girl, "I thought the *Grahame* had tied up for the night!"

"No—only for some slight repairs."

"But surely he will come back when the boat comes!"

"Maybe. Maybe not. Who can tell? The boat will return in the spring. Brian O'Neill may be gone for four years."

"In the spring! Four years! What do you mean?"

"I mean that this is the boat's last trip of the season. She will lay up at Fort McMurray and will not come back until the river is free of ice. As for Brian, he has gone to college in Montreal. A most promising lad—a lad of keen intellect and one who should go far in his chosen calling. In the forty years of my service upon the rivers only one other has sought the higher education. And he did not return to the rivers."

"And Brian O'Neill will not return!" cried the girl vehemently. "Why should he return? What is there here for one who delves deep into books?"

"Your father was a man of education. I have some learning. Seth Adams is a scientist second to none in Canada. We have found our life work in the outlands. And more than any of these three, my daughter, Brian O'Neill is of the North."

The girl opened her lips to reply, closed them tightly, and, turning, fled precipitately. Hot tears blurred her eyes as she stumbled up the steep wooden stairs—tears of anger and of bitter disappointment. In her room she locked the door and, throwing herself upon the bed, gave way to a half hour of uncontrolled sobbing. Brian had come to her—she had refused to see him—and now he was gone! Her refusal had been a banal thing—a whim—a perverse caprice. She had intended to see him

later, before the *Grahame* pulled out in the morning, and now it was too late! He had gone—out of her world—out of her life forever. The great world of men would engulf him. He would acquire other, broader interests; would know other, more beautiful, more attractive women. He would never return!

She knew now how deeply, how passionately, she loved him. Never, not even at the death of her father, had she felt so utterly alone. For Brian had been with her then—had stood by her side as a tower of strength in her adversity. And during all the days and the weeks that intervened, even though he had stood firm in his determination to get an education, there had been the knowledge that he was in the North—that within a few hours, or a few days, she could reach him.

She had all but given up hope of shaking that determination. Too many times already she had dashed herself against that iron will. Nevertheless, she had determined to make one last effort, and in the event of failure to surrender to that will, and to send him on his way with her promise of undying constancy, and her words of love in his ears, and her kisses warm on his lips.

But, now . . . Wild impulse seized her. She would follow him. She would paddle upriver in the wake of the *Grahame!* She would run along the trackline trail clear to Fort McMurray! She would follow him to Montreal! She would not let him send her away—she would not go! She hated Seth Adams! She hated Father Giroux! For these two had sent him out of the North. Education! Dear God, what was education when pitted against love? For all his roughness and gruffness the old inspector was the real man—he would have kept Brian in the outlands where he belonged!

The supper gong sounded but Annette gave it no heed. Later the good Sister Agatha tapped gently upon her door—tapped again—and, receiving no response, carried the glass of milk and the bowl of broth back to the kitchen.

Thirty miles upriver, with the boat warped to the bank for the night, Brian O'Neill sat on the deck long after the others had retired and watched the crescent moon sink lower and lower into the west. How could he know that the girl's refusal to see him had been but a passing whim? That she had not known that the boat would leave within the hour? That she had not known that it was the last trip upriver, and that he was on his way to the outside? He assumed that she did know these things and that her refusal was but the carrying out of her statement that she would forget that Brian O'Neill ever lived. There was much he had wanted to tell her—many plans for the future to be talked over—the assurance of his undying love to be poured into her ears. . . . Oh, well! Perhaps in hard work he could forget Annette Beauleau.

The crescent moon merged with the spruce spires, disappeared, and Brian O'Neill went to bed.

At Fort McMurray he met his father and his mother who had journeyed down from the little cabin on the Clearwater to wish him well.

"Hello, Kelly! And here's Mother, too!" greeted Brian as he hurried down the gangplank. "This will save me a trip. I was going to run up home for a couple of days to see you."

"An' how are ye, me boy? Sam Crane stopped in f'r a bit of a chat a month or more ago, an' he said ye'd be comin' out on the last trip of the *Grahame*. So we

come down to see ye. He told how ye're hell-bent on goin' outside to a college." Then he added with a grin: "An' he snorted an' growled that a good policeman was bein' wasted in the makin' of a bug chaser."

Brian laughed. "Geology is what I expect to specialize in, but I'll know something about entomology, too."

"D'ye hear the lad, Mother? Already he's callin' rocks an' bugs by their fancy names! Lord sakes, boy, by the time ye come back we'll be naydin' an interpreter to talk with ye! But I'd sooner it was rocks than bugs—an' ayther one of them is better than chasin' the rainbow's end over the face of the earth, an' not knowin' what ye seen when ye seen it. Where ye goin', boy—an' how're ye goin' to manage?"

"I'm going to Montreal. Dr. Adams, the chief of this party, is the director of the Geological Survey of Canada and he has promised to see that I get started in college."

"Startin' ain't finishin'. Ye'll be rememberin' that ye've got to eat an' sleep f'r the next four years or so. Mother an' I've be'n talkin' it over since Sam was along an' we figure how with a little economy we can be lettin' ye have around five, or mebbe six hundred dollars a year. 'Tis little enough—but 'twill help. 'Twill not buy many fine clothes—but it will buy a hell of a lot of bread an' dried beef, with now an' then a stew f'r good luck."

For almost the first time in his life Brian felt that hot tears were very near to the surface. Good old Kelly! What had he ever done to help him? He had never stayed home even to help with the farm work. And here were these two old people offering him money they could ill afford to spare that he might be more comfortable in acquiring an education. He swallowed twice

before he answered. "No, no, Kelly—I couldn't touch a cent of it. I don't need it. I've got nearly five hundred coming for my work and Dr. Adams says he can get me a job at the college that will take care of me. It's going to be hard work—but I want hard work. And when I've finished the education will be worth a lot more to me if I earn it than if I had it handed to me on a platter."

"Begorra, ye spoke a true word, me boy! An' it's proud we are of ye. 'Tis many the night we've worried about ye, what with y'r kihootin' about wastin' y'r life like any vagabond. The mother's sung more since Sam Crane stopped by than in any year since ye was big enough to paddle around the first bend of a river. Ye're her first born, Brian—an' different from the rest. Ain't he, Mother? Not that they ain't all right, mind ye—but Brian is Brian—an' the rest is a mess of offspring."

"Father! How're ye talkin' against y'r own flesh an' blood!" cried the little woman in the black bonnet and the stiff black silk dress that rustled loudly with every movement. "But it's true, Brian, aroon—we do kind of hold ye different. It's mebbe because of the worryin' an' all—the others are always home. God bless ye, laddie. 'Twas like a load lifted from the hearts of us when Sam Crane told us ye was goin' to be an educated gentleman. He was all f'r y'r joinin' the police—but Father an' I both held out f'r the college. An' Brian—Sam Crane said there was a girl——"

"There is no girl!" interrupted Brian, so quickly and so gruffly that old Kelly laughed.

"Arraugh—so ye've fought with her, eh? Well, that's a good sign! Me an' Mother's be'n at ut f'r goin' on

forty-two year an' we ain't so much as changed a spot on a calf."

"There is no girl," reiterated Brian, dully this time.

"I'll believe ye when I see her," grinned Kelly O'Neill. "G'wan with ye—but 'tis just as well ye fergit her f'r the next few years or so—women's disquietin' when a man's got to kape his mind on his work. An' remember, boy, that one callus on the brain is worth a dozen on the hands. 'Tis the sorrow of me life that I've had to be continooly meetin' up with men that knowed more than me."

"I guess no one knows any more about fur than you do," said Brian.

"Fur an' tradin' an' Injuns, to be sure—they've be'n me life work—why shouldn't I know 'em? But there's things far an' away beyond fur an' Injuns that ye'll be knowin' an' I don't, because I've never had the chance. Life's short, boy. Waste money if ye must waste—but don't waste time! Pack y'r noodle till y'r eyes bung out, an' when ye git ready to take up y'r life work ye'll have folks settin' up to take notice. Run along now an' help with the unloadin'. Mother an' me'd be pleased if ye'd drop us a line in the spring."

Chapter XX

AND IN FOUR YEARS——

THE lakes froze, and the rivers. Snow came and the Northland lay dead and cold in winter's iron embrace. Annette Beauleau stayed on at the mission of Father Giroux but her heart was no longer in her work. Her thoughts were in far-away Montreal and in her dreams she pictured Brian O'Neill feasting in sumptuous halls surrounded by beautiful ladies in wondrous gowns, like the pictured ladies in the magazines she was wont to pore over in the library.

At Christmas time she made a sled journey to Fort Chipewyan, received her five hundred dollars from Leith, and bought presents for all the children at the mission. Also, she arranged with Leith to pay the money in the future to Father Giroux. The mission had become unbearable. With Brian gone the whole North had become unbearable. An uncontrollable urge seized her to go out of the North—forever. But where? What could she do in the vague "outside," of which she had heard and read much, but knew little? She would go. What mattered what became of her? Life was an ugly thing—a thing of broken hopes and of bitter disappointments.

The good Father Giroux talked long and earnestly in trying to dissuade her but she remained firm in her decision, and in his broad understanding the old priest

knew that she must go—a pathetic figure—a soul with a vast unrest.

Before leaving she handed Father Giroux the five hundred dollars she had drawn from Leith, with instructions to forward it to Brian O'Neill, and she exacted his promise that he would draw each succeeding five hundred and send it to Brian with the understanding that it came from him—in the nature of a loan, if necessary, but under no circumstances must Brian be given so much as a hint as to its source.

In January Sam Crane and a corporal stopped at the mission on their way to Edmonton with a dog-sled outfit and when they pulled out Annette accompanied them.

"May the good God watch over you, guide, guard and protect you, my daughter," said the aged priest as the outfit swung out onto the river trail. "And remember that this is your home. We of the rivers will some day welcome your return."

In Edmonton Inspector Crane established her in the home of a widow of a former policeman, where for the modest sum of seven dollars a week she secured board and lodging.

She deposited her money in a bank and set out to look for work. But work, except of the most menial sort, was hard to get for the girl whose entire life had been spent in the outlands. Her spirit remained unbroken, though there were many heartaches during those first few weeks when she walked the streets, systematically applying at every business house, only to be turned down, gently here, gruffly there, but firmly in each instance.

Time and again she was upon the point of going to

Montreal and seeking out Brian O'Neill. But each time her pride held her back.

Then one day fortune favoured her and she found employment at ten dollars a week as clerk, bookkeeper, and general factotum in the store of a merchant who loaned money on chattels and dealt in goods, new and second hand.

She did her work more than well, albeit she despised her employer who appeared each morning freshly shaven, but who, regardless of how well he groomed himself, always gave the appearance of being uncouth and unclean. He boasted inordinately of being a grandfather at thirty-nine, and it seemed to the girl that the man's insulting eyes were always upon her. Personally, he was loathsome in the extreme. Each morning he would enter the store, inspect his stocks and merchandise. He would then divest himself of coat and collar, loosen the neckband and the first button of his shirt, exposing a mat of black hair, coarse as curled wire. This done, he would enter the heavily screened office at the end of the counter and, leaning over Annette as she sat at her desk, scan the previous day's entries in the books, the while his evil eyes wandering to feast upon the girl's loveliness. A dozen times a day he was wont to scratch his back against the sharp corner of a cabinet devoted to the display of wearing apparel. Without understanding why, Annette felt uncomfortable and threatened while the man was near her.

However, at the end of her first week he paid her promptly, and in gold, for which he demanded a receipt. At the end of the second week he again paid in gold and, upon the pretext of its being the last day of the

month, suggested that she return in the evening and post the books. She did. What transpired is not a matter of record, but it may be remarked that, with a beautifully swollen and blackened eye, but without a clerk, bookkeeper, and general factotum, he opened his shop the following morning an hour later than usual. Three days thereafter he appeared at Annette's boarding house, presumably with an apology upon his thick lips. But the apology was never uttered, and he beat a hurried and undignified retreat down the icy steps when met at the door by the militant police widow, a teakettle of boiling water held suggestively in her hand and a "go yonder" look in her eye.

Soon after the abrupt termination of her mercantile career, Annette entered the hospital as a student nurse, and later, at her own request, was transferred to the library to fill the position left vacant by the marriage of the assistant librarian. Later she was appointed librarian at a salary more than sufficient for her requirements.

One day in June she met Sam Crane on the street, and the veteran officer complimented her warmly upon her progress. "I've been up talkin' with the Widow Carson—always stop in for a bit of chat when I'm in town—Tom Carson an' I was rookies together. An' she was telling me all about you. Told me about your job, too. You ought to killed that damn skunk, just to keep him from gettin' old. Fine woman—the widow Carson—an' she holds you jest like a daughter. Hers died when it was a baby. She sure appreciated your stayin' on with her when, with the money you're makin', you could live anywheres you wanted to."

"Why, I wouldn't think of living any place else!"

cried the girl. "I love Mrs. Carson. She was so good to me when—when I didn't have a friend in the world."

The inspector grinned. "I guess anyone like you don't need to worry about havin' friends enough, Annette——"

"Why, Inspector Crane!" laughed the girl. "Who would suspect you of flattery?"

"'Tain't flattery. It's the God's truth. Everyone down North sent their good wishes. An' they'll be sure proud to know you're head librarian at the hospital—Father Giroux, an' Leith, an' Sister Agatha, an' Corporal Johnson. You'd ought to be arrested for what you done to Corporal Johnson on the trip down—he ain't been worth a damn since!"

The girl laughed, and Inspector Crane noted the slightly heightened colour in her cheeks as she asked: "Is—did Brian O'Neill go back to the river? It must be vacation time now."

"No. He ain't comin' back this summer. I seen old Kelly an' he'd got a letter from Brian. He's gone up to Hudson Bay with the hydrographic survey—learnin' how to make charts an' such. There's some sense to that. Makin' maps an' charts of places is a real job for a man. Damn site better than spendin' four years to a college tryin' to learn why is a jack rabbit."

"Do you think Brian will ever go back?"

The old inspector eyed the girl squarely. "Brian O'Neill," he said, "can't no more stay out of the North than you can. He was whelped in the North an' the North owns him. An' you, too."

"I will never go back," answered the girl dully. "My life work is here."

"Life work—hell!" exploded Sam Crane. "What

kind of a life work is herdin' books fer doctors? Even if you do look like you'd lived in a city all your life your heart's in the North, you belong in the North, an' you're goin' back to the North—in about three years," he added with a broad grin. "Your *life work* will be holdin' the babies while Brian learns 'em the difference between a *Hypo-cadingus* an' a *Kultus sala-ratus*."

"I hate you, Sam Crane!" cried the girl, her face scarlet.

"Yup—jest like you hate Brian O'Neill. So-long. I'll tell the folks downriver you're gettin' along fine."

In the fall, when the palatial hotel on the high bluff overlooking the North Saskatchewan opened for business, Annette Beauleau accepted the position as its cashier at a salary that was whispered to be the highest ever paid a woman in Alberta.

In Montreal Brian O'Neill worked. It was decided in conference with Seth Adams and certain members of the faculty that the lad should take the regular scientific course for the first two years and specialize upon studies to be selected during the last two. His tuition was arranged for out of a special fund for deserving students, and a job as assistant to the curator of minerals took all his spare time. The pay he received just about paid for his tawdry lodging over a store and for his meals at a cheap restaurant. With his iron constitution, built up by his years in the open, his capacity for work seemed boundless, and the avidity with which he attacked his studies won the respect and the admiration of every one of his instructors.

At Christmas Seth Adams came down from Ottawa and carried the lad away for a week's visit in his own

home. Upon learning that Brian had gone outside his course for special instruction in cartography, he arranged for the lad to accompany the hydrographic survey which would put in the summer along the east coast of Hudson Bay.

At the end of the spring term Brian was easily the outstanding student of the institution, winning thereby a scholarship that would take care of his tuition for the remainder of his course.

About half the wages from the previous summer's survey were in bank, the rest having gone for books and clothing, but this gave him small concern as he was on the payroll of the hydrographic for the summer.

Just before leaving for Quebec, where he was to join the outfit, he received a letter from Father Giroux, who recounted bits of river gossip and inclosed a check drawn on an Edmonton bank for five hundred dollars. "You must accept this, my son," the letter read, "from one who will always have your welfare at heart. Consider it as a loan, if you will, and return it when you are able."

"Good old Father Giroux," muttered the lad. "I remember how I used to scoff when he would urge me to study." His lips pressed tight, however, as he realized that the priest had made no mention of Annette Beauleau.

Next day he deposited the check in a savings account, to be drawn upon only in case of direst necessity, and took the train for Quebec.

When he returned in the fall it was to find another check from Father Giroux with more gossip of the North, and at the end he read: "Annette Beauleau left the mission after Christmas and has gone to Edmonton

where, Inspector Crane tells me, she is employed as librarian at the hospital."

So Annette had gone out of the North! She, who had seemed so intrinsically of the North, had forsaken the North. "She'll never go back," he murmured. "Why should she?" And then, with a swift gesture of anger: "Good God—can't I ever forget?"

The second year was a repetition of the first. In the spring came another five-hundred-dollar check from Father Giroux, which was deposited with the others in the untouched fund.

That summer Brian accompanied the Geological Survey into the Churchill River country as assistant to Seth Adams, and the salary he received from the government admitted of his moving into very comfortable quarters in the fall and taking his meals at a high-grade student boarding house. As before, he received the letter from Father Giroux. This time the inclosed check was for one thousand dollars. When he wrote the good priest to thank him he begged him not to send any more money as he had not touched a cent of the previous inclosures and his summer's work now precluded any thought that he ever would touch it."

His third year, which was his first in a selective course, he worked harder than ever seldom sleeping more than four or five hours a night.

When Adams came down at Christmas to take Brian home for his customary vacation he looked over the record of the lad's accomplishments with genuine concern. "You can't do it, Brian. No one can stand a clip like that. It'll get you."

But Brian only laughed. "I'm tougher than you think, Doctor. Honestly, I'm not hurting myself, and while

I've got the chance I'm going to learn everything I can."

"No man can cut out half his sleep and not suffer."

"Napoleon only required four or five hours, I've read."

Adams smiled. "And did you keep on reading till you found out how old he was when he died? You can't burn the candle at both ends. Remember that you are not living in the outlands now."

"Only a year and a half more, and then—the outlands forever!"

Adams was quick to note the fervid intensity of the words, the almost fanatical look in the gray eyes. "You mean that," he said in a tone of quiet conviction.

"Of course I mean it! Why shouldn't I mean it? What is there here for me?"

After a moment of profound silence the older man answered: "It is a question of relative values, in the solving of which every man's mind holds its own scale of measure. With many men the dollar is the unit by which they measure their success. Others strive for honour and glory, political or military prestige, or the prestige due to social triumphs or to scholarly attainment. There are others whom I regard as the chosen few, to whom ultimate success means the happiness and contentment of living their lives in the place and in the manner that they will to live them, scorning both the criticism and the plaudits of the rabble.

"You know the wilderness as natural evolution has made it. And for the past two years and a half you have had the chance to study the conditions imposed by nearly three hundred years of the man-tampering that is called civilization. If you would acquire wealth, or

the appreciation of the hoi polloi, you must remain south of fifty-five. To me, the original research in the exploration of untrodden ways seems the thing most worth while in this world. I have no desire for wealth, and the fact that the government is willing to pay for information that is the fruit of this research enables me to spend most of my life beyond the stench of the bourgeoisie."

"I would rather be in your position than to be the King himself," said Brian.

"You still have a year and a half to choose between civilization and the outlands," continued Adams. "And that reminds me—how would you like to put in next summer in the Sudbury district? I have been asked to recommend a geologist for some special work on the nickel range during the summer. The pay will be better than the government salary for your summer's work and you would have an excellent opportunity to study the ore-bearing formation."

"Why, I had rather work with you, but if you think——"

"My work for the coming summer will be prosaic enough—working in connection with the chief geographer in the preparation of a detail map of Algonquin Park. If I were you I should choose the nickel range."

"The nickel rangeitis then," said Brian, and returned to Montreal to devour everything he could lay his hands on regarding the mineral-producing area of Ontario.

In the spring he received another thousand-dollar check from Father Giroux, inclosed in a rather vaguely worded letter to the effect that he was determined to

keep on sending the money until Brian had finished his course, and that in case the money was not used it could be returned later. The letter puzzled the lad not a little. For the first time he suspected that the funds were being furnished him through Father Giroux as an intermediary. Had Kelly taken this means of sending the money he had refused to accept? If so, had his fortunes brightened to the point where he could afford to spare two thousand a year? Brian thought not. His semiannual letters from home gave no hint of altered economic conditions. Who then was his good angel?

Suddenly he straightened in his chair and for a long time he sat staring into the glowing coals of his open fire. Annette Beauleau! The semiannual checks for five hundred dollars would correspond to her semiannual remittance from Leith—but the sudden doubling of the amount? Could it be possible that she was making this up out of her salary as librarian at the Edmonton hospital? No, no! What was he to Annette Beauleau? She had refused to see him—even to say good-bye when he was leaving the country for four long years. By this time, to use her own words, she had forgotten that Brian O'Neill ever lived. Nevertheless he seated himself at his table and wrote a letter to her. He tore it up and spent an hour writing another. It was midnight when he finished. He slipped it into an envelope, directed it to "Miss Annette Beauleau, Librarian, Edmonton Hospital, Edmonton, Alta.," stamped it, put on his hat, and stood for some moments with his arm resting on the mantelpiece. Then he gently dropped it onto the coals and watched the little red flames de-

vour it. When it had crinkled to a black ash he finished packing his duffel bag for the journey to Sudbury.

He received another check in the fall, and Christmas time found him again in the home of Seth Adams. "Well, my boy, they tell me you've set a new record down in Montreal," said Adams one evening as the two sat late with their pipes and their brandy and soda.

"I've worked. I don't care anything about records. I've tried to learn all I could in the time allotted me and I am satisfied with the result. If others are also satisfied, well and good. If they are not, well and good also. I am working for myself—not for the instructors. Of course I realize that I am just beginning to learn. But I feel that I have at least a good foundation upon which to build."

"'The best equipped scientist that the college has yet turned out,' is the way the president told it to me," smiled Adams. "And, my boy, I'm proud of you. And now it is getting along toward the time when you've got to make up your mind what you are going to do. I suppose you have already been approached? The big moneyed interests are always on the lookout for brains."

"I've received letters inviting interviews or correspondence from several mining companies in Ontario and British Columbia, and one from the Yukon. But I replied to each that I was not open to any engagement, so that correspondence or interviews were useless. The Sudbury people sent their manager down to see me—but I simply told him that I meant what I said in my letter. And that ended it."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Why—work with you if you can find a place for me."

Adams' smile widened. "I guess I can find a place all right. But do you realize that this decision is costing you a very great deal of money?"

"It's worth all it costs. I don't care for money."

"You won't starve," grinned the older man. "You'll always have bread and butter, but sometimes the jam may be a little thin. I'll look around and see what I can find. In the meantime I want you to go home—back to the river country—as soon as they turn you loose down at Montreal, and rest until I send for you."

"But I don't need a rest!" objected Brian. "I feel fit and fine."

"You don't look it. You're thinner than you were and there's a drawn look about your eyes that only the wilderness can iron out. Remember that you are not only working with me but under me. You may consider that as a direct order. Do anything you want to do up there—but do not touch a book from the time you leave Montreal until you see me again. The thing I have vaguely in mind will call for everything you've got at your best. It's no job for a tired man. How are you fixed financially?"

"I'll have plenty. At Sudbury they paid me a thousand dollars a month."

"That's a lot of money to turn down for a government position."

"But not enough," grinned Brian, "to pay me to live in Sudbury."

In cap and gown Brian received his degree, and later in the evening in his dismantled room he took cynical delight in watching that same cap and gown blaze up and crumble to ashes among the coals of his grate.

Next morning he dressed himself in a flannel shirt and rough trousers whose legs were thrust into the tops of a pair of clay-stained pacs. And with his money in his pocket, but without so much as an ounce of baggage, he took the train for Edmonton.

Chapter XXI

"I HATE THE NORTH!"

INQUIRY at the station in Edmonton revealed the fact that he could get no train for Athabaska Landing until the following day. He left the building just as the train from the Landing was pulling in, and, stepping to one side, he eagerly scanned the alighting passengers for sight of a familiar face.

He grinned broadly as he saw Sam Crane step from the coach, and, as the veteran officer started down the street in the direction of the headquarters of G Division of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, he fell in behind. When within a pace or two of the officer's heels he spoke: "Regarding the auricular construction of *Panthestes atricapillus atricapillus*, I am now able to state with authority that in this member of the *Paridæ* group, the cochlea is spirally twisted, and the organ of Corti entirely absent——"

Sam Crane had whirled about at the first words and stood staring as one would stare at a lunatic. Then: "Damned if it ain't Brian O'Neill with my long-lost information about the chickadee's ear!" And passers-by turned their heads to gaze in astonishment at the sight of a gray-haired inspector of the Mounted Police shaking a roughly clad citizen affectionately by the shoulders. The shaking ceased and, holding Brian at arm's length, the officer studied his face. "You've aged in four years, Brian. Doubtless wore plumb out packin'

what you've learnt. What's it goin' to be—policin' or snail-fishin'?"

"Snail-fishing, I guess," laughed Brian. "But you don't seem to have aged any. You don't look a day older than you did the last time I saw you."

"By God, I've lived right! I ain't been cooped up in no town with my nose in a book! I been out where a man don't have to chew the air before he can suck it into his lungs. Where you headin'—downriver?"

"Yes," answered Brian, "downriver. How is everyone?"

"Well, your ma's ailin' a bit this spring. She'll be mighty glad to see you. Kelly's all het up about crossin' cattle with buffalo an' fencin' half of Alberta for a stock ranch. Father Giroux is the same as ever—claims to be seventy-four, but I'll bet he's a hundred an' seventy-four. He looked the same the first day I seen him, forty years aback, as he does to-day. Wisht I'd be as good a man as he is at his age—but they'll pour me back in the jug long before that. Leith still whets his fingernails on his big red beard an' the oil prospectors has mostly all give it up an' gone home. An' as fer the rest of the folks along the river, what of 'em ain't dead is about as usual."

Sam Crane suppressed a grin at the air of indifference with which Brian asked: "And Annette Beauleau? Is she in Edmonton? I heard she was librarian at the hospital."

"Librarian at the hospital!" snorted the officer. "You don't mean to tell me you ain't heard nothin' from her since she quit that job?"

"I have never heard anything from her. Father Giroux wrote a couple of years ago that she was——"

"Well, you're a damneder fool than I thought you was—an' her, too!"

"Is she still in Edmonton?" There was no attempt this time to conceal the impatience.

For answer Sam Crane pointed toward the new hotel, an imposing structure of height and of artistic roofage. "We didn't have that when you was here last," he said. "But we got it now—the best between Winnipeg an' the coast. An' she's the cashier! Yes, sir. She handles more money in a day than you or me handles in a year. An' believe me, she knows her onions. Hotel folks ain't handin' out no more money than they can see returns for. An' they're payin' her more than any woman ever got in Alberta!"

For long moments Brian O'Neill stood, his eyes fixed upon the imposing pile. Then his glance shifted to his flannel shirt, his coarse woollen trousers, and his clay-stained pacs. "I guess," he said, "that if she lives there, I won't bother to call."

Inspector Crane did not hesitate. "Maybe you're right, Brian," he said. "You see—eh—she's changed a lot, too, in the last four years. You'll be pullin' out in the mornin'. How about havin' supper with me tonight?"

"Fine, Sam! It's a long time since I've had supper with one of my own kind—since Christmas, with Seth Adams."

"Didn't I tell you he was the real stuff? But—hell! The crowd he trains with!"

"They're all right, Sam. They're all good men in their line. They've been raised different than we have—that's all. Why, when I went to Montreal I was afraid to cross a street. And it was two years before I learned

the difference between a salad fork and a regular one."

"Well, who gives a damn fer the difference, now you've learnt it? I claim a fork's a fork, jest so it will spear your grub. I been rung in on these here banquets an' things—when I couldn't get out of it—an' believe me, I grab fer the first handy-lookin' tool that will do the work." The man paused, and with a twinkle in his eye continued: "An' they still keep me down North, an' someone else does the Prince of Wales stuff."

In front of police headquarters they parted and Brian spent the afternoon exploring the greater Edmonton —the Edmonton that had sprung up since he had known it. A dozen times he walked past the new hotel —a beautiful, an imposing structure. So Annette was in there—a part and a parcel of its vital existence. Oh, well . . .

At headquarters of the Mounted Police Sam Crane made his brief report and picked up the telephone. "Hello, is this Mrs. Carson? Hello, Jane—Sam Crane talkin'. . . . Yeh, got in to-day. Say, Jane, is Annette goin' to be home to supper to-night? Well, how about you invitin' me an' a friend of mine? Who is he? Well —hell. . . . Yes—it's him—with all the trimmin's the college down to Montreal can hang onto him. But they ain't spoilt him—plumb. Don't say nothin' to Annette —an' maybe you an' me'd better go to the movie to-night."

Toward six o'clock Brian showed up at headquarters. Inspector Crane was half apologetic. "Say, Brian, you don't mind eatin' home cookin' do you? The Widow Carson—Tom Carson's widow—him an' I was rookies together—an' whenever I come to town it's kind of un-

derstood I eat supper with her, on account of old times. You'll like her—she's real folks."

"Why, I'll be glad to—if it won't put her out."

"Put her out—hell! I told her I was bringin' a friend." The two proceeded down the street and turned into a cross street. Before an artistic-looking house they paused. "The widow used to have a kind of a smallish place here," he explained, "but within the last couple of years it's been fixed up some."

"Shall we go in?" asked Brian.

"Sure, that's what we come for."

The door was opened by a matronly looking woman to whom Brian was presented with a curt "Brian O'Neill."

A plump hand was thrust into his own, and motherly lips were saying, "I'm very glad to meet you—Brian O 'Neill."

"Go on in, Brian," said the inspector. "I want to have a look at them mammoth sweet peas I brought the seeds of down from LaBiche."

As the two disappeared around the corner of the house Brian stepped into the living room and stood frozen in his tracks as a book thudded heavily to the floor and a vision in orange and black rose from a chair and stood with one hand pressed tightly against her breast, staring wide eyed into his face.

"Brian!"

"Annette!"

A painful silence ensued, during which Brian's brain groped for words—but no words came. The girl was the first to recover. "So you have finished your education? You must sit right down and tell me all about it."

As Brian took the hand she offered he knew that

his own was trembling. He sank into a chair facing her and summoned a smile. "I got all I could in the time I had," he said in a voice that sounded toneless and flat. "But there isn't much to tell—hard work, that's about all."

"Anyone who knew you could tell that. You look ten years older!"

"I feel older than that," he said wearily. "But, Annette—you've changed too."

She smiled. "Do I look older? Brian, you must never tell a lady she's growing old."

He shook his head slowly, his eyes on her face. "No—not older. It isn't that. But—somehow—different."

A ripple of laughter that sounded a trifle forced greeted the words. "Oh, yes—I'm different. What a terrible little savage I must have been way back in those—other days."

"Do you believe that?" he asked gruffly. "It wasn't what I was thinking." She was aware that his keen eyes had swept in a glance from her bobbed hair to the toes of her orange pumps, and had come to rest upon his own clay-stained pacs.

She flushed deeply. "I didn't mean clothes," she said. "I mean——" The sentence was cut short by sounds of footsteps approaching through the kitchen and the voice of Sam Crane so palpably raised to give warning of their coming that both laughed.

Things went better after that. The supper was an excellent one and Inspector Crane proved the life of the party, forestalling any awkward silences by relating experiences, humorous or tragic, or good-naturedly twitting Brian for passing up policing for the piffling business of scientific research.

The meal over, the inspector looked at his watch. "Get your hat, Jane," he said. "We got to be trottin' along so we don't miss the funnies. We'll make a night of it—take in the first show at one house and the second at another. I don't get up here often enough to get tired of 'em. I like to see 'em all."

"But the dishes——"

"Run along, Mother Carson," said Annette. "I'll take care of the dishes."

"Indeed you won't! You leave 'em lay right where they be an' I'll tend to 'em when I come back."

"All right," smiled the girl, but when the door closed behind the two she stepped into the kitchen and reappeared a moment later with a checkered apron covering the orange-and-black gown. Brian helped and the task was completed almost in silence, the thoughts of each upon that other time they had washed dishes together in the little cabin on the bank of the nameless river down beyond Black Bay.

"Have you ever been back?" asked Brian as the girl slipped out of the apron and hung it on a nail behind the door.

She shook her head. "No. Except for a trip to Vancouver last year I haven't been out of Edmonton since I came. Father Giroux spent a few days in town two years ago and once I met Mr. Leith on the street. He was on his way to Winnipeg—his first trip outside, he said, in twenty-two years. The city had grown from almost nothing since he'd seen it, and, poor man, he looked so—so bewildered, as though he didn't know what it was all about."

"Do you know?"

She glanced up in surprise at the abrupt question.

"Why, yes. It means civilization, and business, and—and ease, and comfort, and—and things that are worth while." He was silent for so long that she asked: "Isn't that what it means to you—the city?"

"To me it means—*hell!*" he replied so fiercely that she was almost frightened. And then, with the fire gone from his voice, he added: "You *have* changed, Annette—even more than I thought."

The girl excused herself and Brian sauntered into the living room, where he examined the peacock feathers arranged in a fan on the wall, the stuffed magpie under its glass dome, the vividly coloured "salt work" box that held the stereoscopic views, the goldfish, the canary, and the highly tinted enlargement of a handsome young officer of the old Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

He was just beginning to realize that the girl had been gone a long time when a soft padding of footsteps sounded upon the stairs. "She has changed her shoes," thought Brian as he remembered the sharp click made by the ridiculously high and narrow heels of her pumps as she had ascended the stairs.

As she entered the room he turned, and the next instant was at her side, one of her hands imprisoned in both his own. "Annette! Annette!" he was whispering in a voice vibrant with emotion as his eyes drank in each detail of her dress—the flannel shirt open as the throat, the stout skirt of striped Yarmouth druggets, and the caribou-skin moccasins, the leggings of heavy blue stroud that replaced the stockings of shimmering silk. "Why—you haven't changed at all! Your beautiful hair is gone—and the tan. I guess I'm pretty white, myself. But we'll get all that back.

Nothing matters, now I know that you are still—you!"

Hot tears dimmed the girl's eyes as she sank into a chair—tears that Brian must not see. She stooped long over the thong of her moccasin. "Tell me all about yourself," he was saying. "Why did you leave the mission? Father Giroux wrote me a couple of years ago that you were librarian at the hospital, but Sam Crane told me to-day that you were cashier of the new hotel. I walked past it a dozen times this afternoon—but I couldn't summon the nerve to go in. I'm glad I didn't now. You don't know how it made me feel, seeing you dressed like—all the other women. I felt like a stranger—as though I didn't know you. Tell me—why did you come to Edmonton?"

"I got tired of the mission. I wanted to do something—see something of the world."

"And, now you've seen it, are you ready to go back?"

She ignored the question, hurrying her words. "Inspector Crane and Corporal Johnson stopped at the mission headed upriver after Christmas and I came outside with them. The inspector persuaded Mrs. Carson to take me in—Mother Carson, I call her. She was so good to me when—when I was tramping the street for weeks looking for work——"

"You wouldn't have had to work," interrupted Brian, "if you hadn't sent me all the money you received from Leith."

"Brian! What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say. And when you began to get a higher salary you doubled the amount."

The girl's face was scarlet. "Did Father Giroux——"

"No, Father Giroux never so much as hinted where the money came from. In his first letter he said for me

to accept it, as a loan if I chose to so regard it, from one who would always have my welfare at heart. And I thought until just a few months ago that the money came from him."

"But how did you find out?"

"Purely by accident—and putting two and two together to make four. When the first check for a thousand dollars came I wrote to Father Giroux and told him not to send any more as I had never touched a penny of the money and didn't need it. When I got his reply, six months or so later, there was another check in it, and a sort of rambling explanation that he was determined to keep on sending the money until I had completed my course. I suspected then that he was acting as an agent for someone else. I thought first it was Kelly. He and Mother had offered to give me five or six hundred a year but I refused because I knew they needed every cent that came their way. But I knew he couldn't dig up a thousand a year, much less than two thousand. You were the only one left, and the payments coming semiannually as they did checked up with your income from Leith. I was puzzled about the thousand until I guessed that you were saving it out of your salary. Here it is, Annette—every cent of it —and all the accrued interest. I banked each check as it came in a savings account to be drawn upon only in case of the direst need—and I never had to draw on it."

"But how did you live?" asked the girl, fingering the draft that Brian had placed in her hands.

"Worked," answered the lad laconically. "I was assistant to the curator of minerals at school and each

summer I worked during vacation. The first two years were pretty tough sledding, then I got better pay and was on Easy Street. Last summer I got a thousand dollars a month for some special work on the nickel range. And I've got two thousand of it in my pocket."

"You never wrote to me," said the girl, a note of reproach in her voice. "Never tried to communicate with me in any way."

"I wrote two letters the night I figured out that you were sending the money—one I tore up and the other I burned. How could I write, Annette, after you had refused to see me—even to say good-bye? I thought you wanted to forget that Brian O'Neill ever lived."

"I did want to forget. That is why I came away from the mission."

"And—had you forgotten?"

"I—yes—that is——"

"You could never forget!" Brian was beside her now, his arm about her shoulders. "You love me—and I love you—and have loved you from the first moment I saw you there at the foot of the fall! I, too, have tried to forget—but there has never been a single day that thought of you was not in my mind. And it will be so until the end of our lives. We will be married in the morning. We leave for the North at noon."

"Married!" The girl leaped to her feet and stood facing him. "Married, and leave for the North to-morrow!" The hazel eyes flashed angrily. The hot blood and the pride that was her heritage from the Beauleaus and the Fontenelles flamed high, withering love, destroying values. And when she spoke her words stabbed like the keen blade of a rapier: "Who are you to order me

to marry you, and at a moment's notice to give up all that I've worked for and accompany you into the North to live in a cabin, or a tepee? You were right when you said that I have changed. I am not the unsophisticated young girl who, at the cabin, and on the lake, and again at Chipewyan, begged you to marry her! You were the whole world to me then. I would have followed you gladly—blindly—anywhere you chose to lead. I would have worked for you—been a wife to you—and we would have been happy. But you scorned that love—you made your choice between me and that education which is the refinement of the civilization that you now profess to hate!

"Then I, too, sought civilization. I would learn what it held that was stronger than love—for you did love me, Brian—you love me now. But if the civilization that you drove me to seek has claimed me you have only yourself to thank! Go North to-morrow if you will! But you'll go alone! I hate the North!" The words choked in her throat. Tears gushed from her eyes and, turning abruptly, she fled from the room. There was the soft sound of rapidly flying moccasined feet upon the stairs, the slamming of a door, and silence.

For long moments Brian O'Neill stood still. Somewhere in the house a brass-voiced clock struck nine. An oblong of buff paper caught his eye and he retrieved the bank draft that had fallen unheeded to the floor. He stared at it for a moment, then slowly turned it over, and as if writing an indorsement, he pencilled the words: "Good-bye." Laying it upon the table beside the stuffed magpie, he picked up his hat and passed out into the night.

From her darkened window Annette, with tight-

pressed lips and hands clenched till the nails bit into the palms, watched him disappear into the darkness beyond the street light.

At eleven o'clock, when Sam Crane and the Widow Carson returned, it was to find the living room deserted. Their eyes met in questioning glance and the widow tiptoed up the stairs to return a few moments later, a dark frown on her face. "She's up in her room—cryin'. I hate that Brian O'Neill! He's caused her all the misery she ever had. Hadn't been for him, she'd been married an' happy long ago. Lord knows she'd had plenty of chances—good ones, too—folks that has automobiles an' don't run around with their boots all covered with mud!"

"Huh!" grunted the inspector. "He's as good as she is—mud or no mud."

"He ain't no such thing! They ain't *no* man good enough for her! Land sakes, Sam Crane—looks like you'd have some sense, at your age! What's she up there cryin' her eyes out for then? Tell me that! It's because he's hurt her—that's why!"

"Maybe the hurtin' was the other way 'round."

"They've had a quarrel—that's what. An' jest like a man, he's said somethin' mean."

"An' jest like a woman," grinned the officer, "she never opened her head, I s'pose."

"There's no fool like an' old fool, Sam Crane—you make me sick!

"Now, look here, Jane—chances is them two young folks has had a battle of some sort, but I don't see no call to make it a general engagement. I'll hunt up Brian in the mornin' an', if he'll talk, I'll get the straight of it."

"Get the straight of it! I'll get the straight of it—an' I'll get it from *her!* An' when I do you'll find out she's right!"

"Well, maybe," admitted the inspector, a twinkle in his eye. "Women sometimes is."

Chapter XXII

MAN OF THE NORTH

But Inspector Crane did not see Brian the following morning—nor for many mornings thereafter.

Wandering aimlessly about the streets after leaving the Widow Carson's, the lad paused suddenly before a brilliantly lighted garage. In the office two men sat talking. Brian opened the door and walked in. "How is the road to Athabaska Landing?" he asked.

"None too good," answered a man, evidently the proprietor.

"Can you get a car over it?"

"Sure."

"I want to go there. Do you have cars for hire?"

"Yes. When would you want to go?"

"Right now."

"Won't morning do? I don't know as I could get hold of a driver this time of night."

"No, I want to go now."

The garage man frowned and thoughtfully scratched the side of his nose with a lead pencil. Then he turned to his companion. "How about you? Want to make a drive?"

The other considered. "Well, I might—to help you out. I never been to the Landin'. How far is it?"

"Oh, around between ninety an' a hundred miles. The road ain't so good but you won't have no trouble.

Hit straight north—you can't get off the road once you get on it."

"All right, I'll go. Wait till I call up the old woman."

A few minutes later they had left Edmonton behind and were headed northward through a level farming country dotted with groves of poplars and willows that loomed as dark blotches in the feeble starlight.

As the farming country gave place to swamps and wooded hills the driver's curiosity regarding this nocturnal traveller who carried no baggage led him to attempt conversation, but, meeting with no success, he lapsed into silence and shortly after daylight delivered his passenger in the little town that is the gateway of the North.

Brian bought a canoe, loaded her with the necessary supplies, and within two hours of his arrival pushed out into the current of the mighty Athabaska.

Several days later he headed up the Clearwater, and on the next day but one beached his canoe before the cabin of Kelly O'Neill, to be welcomed with open arms by old Kelly and his mother and shyly by a half-dozen assorted brothers and sisters. "Reminds me of the return of the prodigal," laughed Brian later as he helped Kelly butcher a calf.

"Yep—only different, me boy. F'r if I thought ye'd be'n wastin' yer time an' yer money on wild women an' whatnot, like the Book says, I'm doubtin' I'd kill a calf f'r ye—unless mebbe a runt, or a sick one. Anyways, not a catalo calf."

"A what?" asked Brian.

"Sure, a catalo. A cross between a range cow an' a full-blood buffalo bull. Sam Crane fixed it up so I could borry the loan of a bull from the Wainwright herd

an' I've got seven as fine calves as ye'll wish to see. 'Tis the future of the country, Brian—the catalo. They can winter out where cattle can't. It's fine meat ye'll be eatin' at dinner, an' ye deserve it. It's great things I've be'n hearin' about ye—beatin' the whole school an' comin' out ahead of 'em all!"

"Where did you hear that?" laughed Brian. "I'm sure I never mentioned it."

"Ye did not. F'r all the braggin' ye ever done in y'r letters, ye could of be'n draggin' along behint the tailin's. But Seth Adams is a fine mon, entirely. At the end of each school year he'd set down, an' he'd write me a letter on fine government paper wid DIRECTOR GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CANADA printed across the top, an' he'd tell me all about how ye'd be'n doin'. He said he thought I'd like to be knowin'. An' Brian, boy, twould done y'r heart good to see Mother take on over them letters! She's cried over 'em, an' she's laughed over 'em, an' she's got 'em every one put away in the bottom of the big trunk along with her Gran'ther Larrigan's Bible an' the bit of shamrock we picked together the day before we was married, on the hills back of Ballyshannon, in auld County Donegal. An' Mr. Adams, he'd write to Father Giroux, too—an' Father'd send the letters down by Sam Crane an' we'd all read 'em, an' she's kept them, too. 'Tis proud we are of ye, boy —an' to think they's be'n times when I've misdoubted ye'd ever amount to a damn!"

After dinner Kelly took Brian for a round of the farm, showing him with evident pride the buffalo bull in his strongly fenced inclosure and the seven catalo calves.

"You shouldn't have killed that one, Kelly," said

Brian as they seated themselves on the sunny side of a haystack for a smoke.

"Ah, he was a little bull an' I've got two more," replied the older man. He added with a chuckle, "An' to tell the truth, I've be'n honin' to cock me lip over a piece of the meat, meself."

"Do you think they'll breed? Some hybrids won't—mules, for instance."

Kelly grinned. "Well, they's still mules, ain't there?"

"Yes, but cross-breeding on a big scale will be pretty expensive, won't it?"

"Let me tell ye a thing, boy—never worry about somethin' that's two-three years off. If them catalos don't breed—to hell with 'em."

"You never worry much about anything, do you, Kelly?"

"What's the use? Begorra, I never seen worryin' change nothin'. The things folks worries about ayther comes out all right or they don't."

"It's a good philosophy," said Brian, "and simple."

"What ye goin' to do, now y're edjicated?"

"Nothing, for the present. I'll stay here a few days, and then I'll drift on downriver. I don't know. And I don't much care."

The older man was quick to catch the note of indifference in the voice. He slanted a glance toward the other, who sat with his eyes on the far hills. "An' how about the girl?" he asked.

"There is no girl," answered Brian. "I told you that once before."

"What's the use lyin' to me, Brian O'Neill?" chided the old man, a bit testily. "I heard all about her from Father Giroux an' again from Sam Crane. An' begorra,

I stopped in an' looked her over when I was goin' down to Wainwright about the bull."

"You—what?"

"Sure, an' I did. There in the big hotel that looks like a castle—an' a fittin' place f'r her, f'r she looks like a queen, wid her fine clothes an' grand manners. If she seen me at all she little thought the mick that was gawpin' at her would some day be her father-in-law. A fine-lookin' woman, Brian—but one, I'm misdoubtin' would foller ye far through the brush."

"She won't," answered Brian shortly, and, rising, he knocked the ashes from his pipe.

A few days later Brian took leave of old Kelly at the little landing. "What's the matter with Mother?" he asked. "She doesn't seem well."

A look of deep concern showed in the old man's eyes. "I don't know, boy. She's be'n ailin' all spring. Her grub don't set right on her stummick. An' she's fallin' off steady. She's took three bottles of pain killer but it don't seem to do no good."

For answer Brian counted out five hundred dollars in bills and thrust them into the old man's hand. "Take her down to Edmonton to the hospital. Tell them to give her a thorough examination and to operate, if necessary. Don't give her any more pain killer and if you need more money you can reach me through Father Giroux."

For the first time in his life Brian saw tears in Kelly's eyes. The old man gripped his hand till it hurt. "Ye've saved her life, boy. I was figurin' to do it but they'd be'n no money till fall an' mebbe 'twould be'n too late. Take keer y'rself—an' Brian, if ye want that gurl—go get her. No O'Neill yet ever quit."

Brian spent a day at Fort McMurray renewing old acquaintances and then dropped on downriver, bringing up one evening just at sunset at the mission of Father Giroux. "I stopped in Edmonton and returned the money to Annette," he said when they had got their pipes going on the veranda little.

"You knew then?"

"I guessed it toward the last."

"I was hoping that when you returned to the rivers you would come back together—you two."

"I'll not be staying long on the rivers. I must go where men hire brains—not muscle."

"Has civilization, then, claimed you?"

"I hate civilization—and all that it stands for! I have learned what they could teach me—and what does it all amount to? Nothing!"

"A deep and a bitter cynicism to fall from the lips of one so young. You are brain-weary, lad. What you need is rest."

"A few days on the rivers and I'll be going outside," answered Brian.

"You will stop here before you go?"

"Yes—to say good-bye."

The following morning Brian retrieved his old outfit from the storehouse where he had left it four years before and, loading it into his canoe, pushed out into the river.

At Fort Chipewyan he bought supplies and headed eastward, skirting the north shore of Lake Athabaska, a morbid urge impelling him to visit, once again, the little cabin on the bank of the nameless river. He travelled slowly, landing often to examine the rock formation, or to make notes on birds, or on insects

By the time Black Bay was reached the urge to visit the cabin was gone. Off Cracking Stone Point he explored the islands, and one evening he flipped a coin to determine whether he would continue eastward for a few days or return to Chipewyan and the outside.

The easterly trip won and he proceeded at a leisurely pace. Wind-bound for four days, he explored several Huronic quartzite areas, taking notes on the formation, the strike of the rocks, their dip and probable extent.

With the passing of the days his notes became less and less frequent, until one day when he saw an osprey which he realized was farther north than the species had been previously reported, he grinned cynically and deliberately left his notebook in his pocket. After that he took no more notes.

Two weeks later he showed up at the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fond du Lac, bought more supplies, and, continuing eastward, headed up the little-known Chipman River. On Birch Lake he encountered an Indian who told him that the red death had broken out among a little band of Chipewyans who were encamped on an island in a lake to the northward. Brian set him on his way with orders to notify the police and proceeded northward to find eleven cases of smallpox among the nineteen survivors of the band. Four had died. He took immediate charge, removing the eight well ones to the mainland with instructions to hunt and to leave the meat on a point where he could pick it up with the canoe. He himself tended the fish nets and did the cooking for the sick. Two of the shore party contracted the disease and these he brought to the island. Three others died before the peak of the epidemic had passed.

Nearly three weeks later Sam Crane and a constable came with supplies and found all the survivors well on the road to recovery.

Brian O'Neill had gone.

Days passed into weeks, and weeks into months, as Brian paddled on and on in the aimless exploration of unmapped rivers and lakes. He had only a vague idea of where he was, and he did not care. His supplies had long since been exhausted and he was living entirely off the country—meat, fowl, and fish savoured with native salt, with berries as the sole variation. But he knew, now, that he would never go out of the North.

Shortly before the freeze-up he appeared at Fort Chipewyan.

"Losh, lad, an' wheer ye be'n?" inquired Leith. "Theer's be'n a letter from Seth Adams waitin' ye at Father Giroux's for better than a month."

Brian shrugged. "Let it wait," he said indifferently. "How's chances for a job fishing?"

"Fishin'!" The old Scot stared as he combed at his enormous red beard with his fingers. "If ye wadna fish before, ye'll nae be fishin' the noo, wi' all ye know! 'Tis told on the rivers ye know more than Seth Adams himsel'."

"It's easier to forget than it is to learn," answered Brian shortly. "I'll have it all out of my system by spring. Do I get the job?"

"To be sure ye do, an' ye're in earnest aboot it! An' glad I'll be to hire ye. What wi' the Injuns gittin' lazier an' more worthless every year an' fifty thousan' fish to put by fer the winter, why wouldn't I gi' ye the job?"

"I'll put your fish up. Get your crew together and make them go over the nets and the boats, and I'll be back in four days."

He left the store, leaving Leith staring after him in speechless astonishment.

At the mission he received and read the letter from Adams—an epistle brief and to the point, suggesting that he come as soon as possible to Ottawa for a conference. Brian read the letter and tossed it across the table to Father Giroux.

"So you will be going outside?" said the priest.

"No. I'll be heading downriver within an hour. I'm going to put up Leith's fish for him."

"Fish! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I've agreed to put up fifty thousand fish for Leith. And if you haven't already made arrangements for your winter's supply, I'd like the job. I can freight them up after the freeze-up. You'll be needing about twelve hundred percers, I suppose?"

The older man ignored the question. "Where have you been, Brian?"

"Northeast of the lake—way back. I found some good trapping grounds. I'm going back when snow flies."

"Do you mean to tell me, my son, that despite your education you have reverted into just what you were before you obtained it?"

"Education can't change a man's nature."

"But it can expand that nature—awaken it to the realization of new values——"

Brian interrupted with a sneering laugh. "Civilization, for instance! Cities—and all that they stand for. Damn civilization! And damn its standard of values.

I have rediscovered what I knew before I ever saw their cities—that the wilderness is the only thing that counts."

"But working with Adams would keep you in the wilderness most of the time."

"Yes," answered the younger man bitterly, "and to work with Adams would be to serve the civilization that I despise—the civilization that has robbed me of the woman I loved more than life itself! It was for her I worked for four long years, harder than I ever worked, or ever again will work! And now I am in the North, and she is out of the North because civilization has engulfed her—has claimed her for its own! She begged me to stay in the North—to marry her—promising that we would find our happiness in each other. She warned me that much learning did not make for happiness. And now when it is too late I know that she was right. Until civilization restores to me what it has taken from me I will never serve its ends by so much as the turn of a hand!"

"But my son, think of the waste—the loss of effort, of time, and of money—that would ensue should you revert to just what you were before—a common vagabond of the outlands."

"The waste is mine and the loss is mine, if waste or loss there be! I paid my own way. I didn't ask odds of anyone. I worked for all I got—but I didn't get all I worked for—by a damned sight! My loss is irreparable—the loss of my chance for happiness! If I can't be happy at least I can be consistent in hating the civilization that caused the loss!" He rose abruptly and put on his hat. "Good-bye, Father Giroux. There is nothing more to be said. You and I are as far apart as the

poles in our beliefs. It will do no good to argue. At least we can still be friends."

The aged priest shook his silvery head sadly. "It grieves me to see such a deep and a bitter cynicism in the heart of one so young. As you say, argument will serve no purpose, and we can remain friends, though our beliefs differ. But are you not going to notify Dr. Adams of your intention to remain in the North? He has been a good friend to you, Brian, and he will be expecting you."

The younger man hesitated and, abruptly seating himself at a desk, wrote a brief note which he placed in an envelope. He directed and handed it to Father Giroux. At the door he turned. "About the fish," he asked. "Will you be needing them?"

"Yes, I will need twelve or fourteen hundred percers. I was intending to go to Chipewyan within a day or two and see about them. I will rest assured of my fish but I had rather see you heading for Ottawa."

"I have seen Ottawa for the last time," answered Brian. And the next moment he was gone.

Three months later the note reached Seth Adams with a letter from Father Giroux.

Chapter XXIII

THE LURE OF GOLD

ARISTIDE LATROBE, together with Bryce, his secretary, and his daughter, Celeste, were in the boudoir of Madame Latrobe upon the day following her funeral. Suppressing an ill-concealed eagerness to be at the business in hand, Aristide Latrobe fumbled at the ribbon of his pince-nez and addressed his daughter: "As you doubtless know I have not, of late years, been very deeply in the confidence of your mother."

"How extraordinary," drawled the girl, crossing her knees and lighting a cigarette.

Latrobe ignored the interruption. "As far as I know, her estate consisted merely in an annuity which, of course, ceased with her—ah—lamented demise. It is possible that she possessed other property of which I know nothing—merely possible, but most highly improbable. It is also possible that she left a will." The man paused and cleared his throat nervously. "If so, we shall doubtless find it in her wall safe and it is for the purpose of opening that safe that we are here. You may know that I have certain rights in all real estate of which your mother may have died possessed—rights, I may state, which would seriously embarrass any attempt upon your part to dispose of such property. I therefore propose that, in the interest of

both of us, we arrive at a certain agreement. Now, my own fortune——"

"Is it worth mentioning—after Monte Carlo?" asked Celeste, flicking the ash from her cigarette to the thick carpet.

The man frowned. "If you will kindly refrain from further interruption I——"

"You will propose that we pool our visible and invisible assets. No, let me talk for a minute—I'll get to the point without beating about the bush. In other words you know that if there is a will you are due, in all probability, to fare very badly. Therefore you are willing to give up any right you may have in the real estate and contribute the sad remnant which you have so humorously, or ironically, referred to as a fortune, providing I will do likewise. Of course, in the event of a will unfavourable to both of us, we could merely tear it up. Then we are to add up the property, whatever it may be, and divide it by two. Shame on you, Papa mine, for trying to cheat your innocent little daughter! But I'm a good sport. I'll agree. Let us open the safe and find out what we are to divide."

Aristide Latrobe hemmed and hawed and readjusted the pince-nez. "You have—ah—in effect divined the proposal I was about to make. But, my dear Celeste, it pains me to think that you have imputed a—a dishonest or an ulterior motive to that proposal. If I had been actuated by any such motive would I have invited you to attend this conference?"

The girl laughed and tossed her cigarette into the grate. "No, no, Papa, indeed you wouldn't—and you didn't until you caught me tagging after you up the stairs! Why do you think I wasted half the afternoon

reading with one eye on the stairway if it wasn't to prevent your slipping up here and destroying a will, if you found one? I'll tell you why. It was because I couldn't get into the wall safe! If I could have opened I would have removed the will and whatever else I found of value to a place of, let us say, greater safety. So our game has come to a stalemate and we must call it a draw. The only difference between us, Papa mine, is that I am honest enough to admit that I am—dishonest."

Behind Latrobe's back Bryce grinned. He admired Celeste immensely—was in love with her, in fact. And she shamelessly encouraged that love. It was Bryce who kept her informed as to her father's doings in Europe and as to his financial ups and downs. It was he, also, who had slipped her the word that Aristide had found the keys to the wall safe and that he would visit it upon this very afternoon.

With a gesture of impatience, and a muttered imprecation, Latrobe advanced across the room and fitted a key to the steel door. It swung open to disclose a second door, or steel panel, which, upon being unlocked, slid sidewise into the wall. The safe consisted of a single deep drawer, some six inches wide by eighteen inches long, with a depth of eight or ten inches. This drawer was removed and placed upon the floor, where all three knelt about it eagerly.

"A-a-a-h!" The long, lean fingers of Aristide Latrobe reached for the jewel case that rested on top of a thin packet of papers. The lid flew open at his touch and the next moment his eyes gleamed with avarice as he held aloft a necklace of diamonds that flashed and gleamed in the light of the electrolier.

"The Beauleau necklace! Thirty thousand dollars, if they're worth——" The words froze on his lips as a silvery laugh pealed from the throat of the girl. His face grayed and he stared wide eyed as peal after peal of ironic laughter filled the room. The laughter ceased and the girl spoke:

"Shame on you, Papa, for not knowing the difference between paste and the real stones! For three years now these imitations have been masquerading as the Beauleau necklace. You remember when Mama and I took our fling at Paris? Did you think we financed that trip out of her annuity? Oh, no! For those few weeks we really lived—and the Beauleau diamonds paid the bills! They are clever at imitation in Paris."

With a curse Aristide Latrobe hurled the necklace from him. It crashed against the wall and lay, a glittering heap, in a corner. Again the girl laughed.

"It was this knowledge that led me to agree so readily to relinquish my right under any will. Do you suppose I would have done so had I not known that the necklace was paste?"

The case followed the necklace and with trembling fingers the man withdrew the papers. The first was a clipping, evidently from a Quebec newspaper, which he handed to Celeste. She held it to the light and read aloud:

"*Edmonton, Alta., Nov. 11th.* The Mounted Police record the death by shooting of Thibaut Colbert in a cabin somewhere to the northward of Lake Athabaska. Details of the affair are meagre, merely that the man was shot and killed by one Byron McNulty, after Colbert had killed an Indian and was in the act of attacking a young girl. Colbert, whose home is said to have been in Quebec, was not unknown to the

police of the western provinces. It will be remembered that he was arrested several years ago in Saskatchewan in connection with the murder and robbery of two Austrians who had drawn a considerable sum of money from the bank to invest in what was alleged to have been a land swindle engineered by Colbert. He was later released through lack of sufficient evidence. It is also alleged that he was mixed up in numerous mining ventures of a questionable nature, both in Alberta, and in British Columbia."

And, under a Quebec dating, she read:

"Thibaut Colbert was the son of Jules Colbert, senior partner in the Quebec firm of Colbert, DeRussie, & Lalonde. After the death of his father and the subsequent decline of the family fortunes Thibaut Colbert became known as a man about town, a gambler, and a promoter of wild-cat mining ventures.

"So far as can be learned there are no surviving relatives in the city."

"So that was the end of Thibaut Colbert," said Latrobe. "He was an unscrupulous scoundrel! He once did me out of a pretty penny! Just when I thought I had him where he couldn't wriggle out! He got his just deserts. But why should Mathilde have treasured that clipping? What was Thibaut Colbert to her?"

As he talked Latrobe removed the rubber band from about the remaining papers, and, unfolding the uppermost, read it through, after which he passed it over to Celeste and busied himself with the remaining paper, which proved to be the report of a firm of assayers upon certain samples of mineral. He peered into the box and removed three fragments of rough-looking rock, which he examined with evident interest.

"I have it!" he cried at length as Celeste scanned the report. "The letter is from Jovin Beauleau, your

mother's brother who married against the command of his father and was cut off from any inheritance in the Beauleau estate. Shortly after that he disappeared and was never heard from again. It is evident that he wrote to Mathilde, offering her a share in his mining venture if she would finance it. And Mathilde sent Thibaut Colbert out to investigate—probably with instructions to swindle Jovin and his daughter out of the property. She hated the very name of Jovin Beauleau and the fact that he mentioned in his letter that he had found happiness and contentment would hardly, I believe, have tended to soothe Mathilde's feelings toward him. For she has assumed the air of unhappiness and discontentment almost from the day of her marriage to me."

"Again, I may say, how extraordinary!" taunted the girl. "But all that is neither here nor there. It seems there is no will and all we have for our pains is a handful of paste jewels, and a letter, and a report, and three small pieces of rock. Not a formidable array of wealth —unless this mine should turn out to be really valuable. I suppose Mama never investigated further?"

"It is extremely improbable. She could not go herself, and Colbert would be the only man of her acquaintance in whom she would confide. As you suggested, Celeste, this property may prove to be extremely valuable. I shall take these samples to an assayer here in Quebec and have this report verified."

"I'll go with you," said the girl.

Latrobe frowned. "Oh, very well. And to show you that I harbour no suspicion of *your* good faith in the matter I shall intrust the samples and the report to you. Meet me at the Hotel Frontenac in an hour."

"How about the—necklace?" asked the girl with a short laugh.

Latrobe scowled and, with hardly a glance toward the glittering heap in the corner, replied: "Oh, you may keep that as a slight remembrance of your dear mother."

"Thanks, awfully," answered Celeste. "Your generosity is almost overwhelming. It is possible, though, that I may be able to realize enough out of them for a new gown."

When Latrobe, followed by Bryce, had quitted the room, Celeste lighted a cigarette and smiled approval at her reflection in the pier glass. Swiftly she crossed the room, gathered the necklace and its case into her hands, and returned to the glass, where for minutes she allowed her eyes to devour the glinting jewels. "I put it over!" she breathed to herself. "He really believes they are paste! And thirty thousand dollars is an old appraisal. They're worth much more now. If Papa only knew what a miserable time we really had in Paris living on Mama's annuity! Poor Papa, it seems that everybody takes advantage of him. If he hadn't been so interested in his dear Spanish lady at Monte Carlo he wouldn't have commissioned Bryce to do most of his gambling for him. La, la, la! If he knew that Bryce had most of the money he thinks he lost! It won't take me long to get it from Bryce—he hasn't many more brains than Papa has."

Returning the necklace to its case, she placed it in the safe, locked the doors, pocketed the keys, and, stepping into her own room, dressed for the street.

That evening there was a consultation in the library of the Latrobe mansion. "The assayers are really ex-

cited about these samples," said Latrobe. "They verified the other report in every particular."

"And they said that never had they seen a more promising proposition."

"Providing that the ore bed is of any considerable extent."

"But they said that even a small deposit of ore as rich as the samples would prove extremely valuable. And dear Uncle Jovin wrote that there was a fortune in it for both!"

"He may have succeeded in financing it somewhere else," suggested Latrobe. "But I consider the proposition well worth investigating. Bryce and I shall leave immediately and go carefully over the ground."

"I'll go with you," said the girl.

"Now, now—my dear Celeste! That will be utterly impractical——"

"You don't need to 'dear Celeste' me! There is nothing impractical about it. Even if there is I'm going. And, Papa mine, you may as well understand now as later that until this venture either proves worthless, or begins to pay, I'm not going to be out of sight of your coat tails for one single minute. And when it begins to pay I'll move up right beside you!"

A week later—to be exact, upon the twenty-first day of May—the three registered at the new hotel in Edmonton. Inquiry revealed the fact that the Hudson's Bay Company's scow brigade was due to leave Athabaska Landing in ten days, that they could obtain passage with the brigade to Fort McMurray, and from there to Fort Chipewyan by the Company's steamer *Grahame*.

At the recorder's they learned that no mining claim

had been filed by Jovin Beauleau. Police records revealed the fact that Jovin Beauleau had died some five years previous from an accidental gunshot wound and that he had been buried near his cabin to the northward of Lake Athabaska by one Brian O'Neill. The whereabouts of Beauleau's daughter was not a matter of police record. Inquiry developed the fact that Brian O'Neill was somewhere in the North, probably in the vicinity of Fort Chipewyan.

Armed with this information, they had little to do except purchase the necessary outfit and kill time until the departure of the brigade.

The Latrobes and Bryce were a trio to attract attention. It was whispered about that Miss Latrobe smoked openly in the grill room. And this several years in advance of the time when ladies were wont to smoke openly in Edmonton grill rooms.

From within her bronze-wicketed inclosure Annette Beauleau studied Celeste from the first day of her arrival. Nothing of the bourgeoise about this girl from far-off Quebec. Her poise, her manner, the very set of her gowns bespoke the born aristocrat. Yet there were jarring notes: a hard, at times almost cruel, glint of the eyes; her treatment of the young man who was at her side every moment he was not at the heels of her father—now flirting openly and outrageously with him —now ignoring the fact that he was present; her smoking; her skirts, foreshortened by inches beyond the most daring Edmonton skirt of the day; and at times, when seated, her manner of disposing her skirts to reveal the absence of certain lingerie then considered by Edmonton as essential to feminine modesty.

Several times they had met as Annette was going off

duty. The first time she was aware of the swift glance of appraisal with which the other woman swept her from head to foot. Was aware, also, of the look of open approval that she received from Bryce. And, womanlike, she noted that the young man's look had been seen by his companion. After that the meetings had elicited only a slight but obvious lifting of the chin, and once just the suspicion of a curl of the thin aristocratic lips.

It was upon the day before the departure of the trio for the North that neat brass tablets appeared in the hotel bearing the names of various clerks and functionaries during the hours they were on duty. Annette happened to be looking when Celeste and Bryce passed her wicket. She saw the girl stop and whisper hurriedly to her escort as both stared at the brass tablet upon which were the words:

MISS BEAULEAU

Cashier

Abruptly the girl walked straight to the wicket. "Miss Beauleau?" she asked with a drawl that rendered the question an insult.

Annette flushed slightly and bowed. "Yes," she answered. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. You can tell me the name of your father."

For an instant Annette stared, speechless, as she felt the hot blood rise to her cheeks. Then she smiled, as she would smile at a child. "I never discuss private matters with—strangers."

The girl beyond the wicket flushed scarlet. "It is the spelling of the name. It is generally spelled B-e-a-u-

l-i-e-u. I knew a man once who spelled his name as you do."

"It was doubtless another," answered Annette, and turned abruptly away.

Furious, Celeste Latrobe strode to the desk and asked for the manager. Shown into his office, she began without preliminary: "Your cashier has insulted me!"

"Yes?" The manager eyed the irate woman coldly.

"Yes. She did. And I demand that she be discharged immediately!"

"Ah? And would you mind explaining the nature of the alleged insult?"

"I merely asked her the name of her father: and she as much as told it me was none of my business."

"Was it?"

"Yes, it was. At least, I consider it so. And I certainly consider it an insult when any common menial in a hotel refuses to answer the question of a guest."

"It would be well for you to understand," said the manager suavely, "that Miss Beauleau is in no sense a menial. Her position in this institution is second only to my own. Under the circumstances I would advise that you seek other accommodations. There are several good hotels in the city. May we expect your keys within the hour?"

"Do I understand that you are ordering me from this hotel?" cried the girl furiously.

"I hope so. My suggestion was tantamount to an order."

"I'll sue you for damages!"

"Do so, by all means. We would welcome such suit, on the evidence."

"I'll tell everybody I know that this hotel is one

where everybody, from the manager down, goes out of his or her way to insult guests!"

The manager smiled. "That would be unique advertising, which would cost us nothing. May I consider that a promise?"

The next moment the girl was gone and an hour later the trio checked out.

Chapter XXIV

SAM CRANE DIPS HIS PADDLE IN

It was toward the end of June that Sam Crane stopped, on his way upriver, at the mission of Father Giroux.

"Have you seen Brian O'Neill?" asked the old priest when they had got their pipes going.

"Yes, an' it's a damn shame! He's gone plumb Injun! An' him with the education he's got! Not that I go so much on the education. But what did he go an' get it for if he ain't goin' to use it? He's worse than he was before. He come back into the country last spring an' went to doin' jest what he used to do—wanderin' all over hell where other folks don't go. I run acrost his trail up on Selwyn Lake where he pulled a bunch of Injuns through a dose of smallpox. Saved most of 'em, where if he hadn't happened along they'd all died, most likely. Wouldn't one man in a hundred tackled it, unless they had to, an' he didn't. A man like that—why in hell ain't he policin', instead of wastin' his time gogglin' at the country?

"Next time I seen him he was fishin' fer Leith—runnin' a gang of Injuns puttin' up fish! I tried to auger with him but he wouldn't talk. Said he was satisfied an' that ended it. Then he trapped all winter over to hell an' gone beyond the lake. An' now he's up an' hired out as guide to three of the damnedest tenderfoots that

ever come into the country—two men an' a woman that don't look like they'd ever been nowheres nor seen nothin'. He's gone Injun, I tell you—an' it's all on account of that damn fool girl, which she don't know a real man when she sees one!"

"It is the way of the world, Inspector. Women ever influence the lives of men."

"Huh—they can raise hell with 'em when they ain't got no sense, if that's what you mean. Why don't Seth Adams give Brian a job? That's what I'd like to know. It was him that was so hell-bent on Brian's gettin' educated."

For answer, Father Giroux rummaged in his desk and handed the inspector the letter that had come for Brian the previous fall.

"An' Brian wouldn't go to Ottawa?" he asked.

"No, he refused to go."

"Would he talk to you? What did he say?"

"I tried to persuade him to go to Adams, pointing out that his work would keep him for the most part in the outlands. But he replied that he hated civilization. That working with Adams would be serving the civilization that had robbed him of the woman he loved, and that until civilization restored her to him he would not serve it by so much as the turn of the hand."

"Huh," grunted Sam Crane. "'Tain't civilization that's at the bottom of it. It's her damn' pride an' his not knowin' nothin' about women. I kind of pieced it out from what Jane Carson told me about what she got out of the girl. An' I'll bet a month's pay that right now she'd rather be here on the rivers with him than where she's at, if she got twice the money she's gettin'.

I'll bet she's wishin' an' hopin' that he'll go back for her—but he won't. Them Irish is stubborn."

"It is too bad—too bad," said Father Giroux. "But there seems to be nothing one can do."

"I ain't so sure about that," muttered Sam Crane. "I hate to think of them two young folks bein' miserable when they might jest as well be happy. I'm goin' outside—got to go to Ottawa an' see the commissioner about a new post. An' I'm a-goin' to dip my paddle in an' see what I can do—things can't be messed up no more than what they are now anyway."

Inquiry in Ottawa revealed the fact that Seth Adams was somewhere in the God's Lake country and was not expected back until late summer or early fall.

On his return the inspector called one evening at the home of the Widow Carson. "Where's Annette?" he asked after detailing all the police gossip.

"She's out automobile ridin' with the manager of the hotel. He takes her ridin' two or three times a week. He's a fine man, Sam. I hope she marries him. Makes lots of money, got a big automobile—an' clothes! Sam, you ought to see his clothes. An' he knows how to wear 'em. Jest the kind of a man fer Annette. Shouldn't be surprised if she told me any day, now, that they was engaged. He thinks a heap of her, too—you can see it in his eyes."

"H-u-m," said Sam Crane. "What does she think about him?"

The Widow Carson hesitated a moment before replying. "Well, she likes him, or she wouldn't go out with him so much. I wouldn't hardly say she was really in love with him—yet. But she will be. He don't give her no chance to fergit him. Sees her every day and two

or three nights a week. Sends her flowers an' boxes of candy, an' takes her to shows an' things. She'd be in love with him now, if she could ever ferget that Brian O'Neill. She never mentions him but I know! Lots of times I catch her settin' alone—thinkin'. An' I know her thoughts is in the North—with Brian O'Neill. An' now an' then, when she thinks I ain't lookin', she'll reach up an' brush away a tear. What she ever seen in him—runnin' around with his boots all mud! I declare to goodness! Mr. Marsden—he's the hotel manager—his shoes shines like they was made of black ivory!"

"H-u-m," commented the inspector. "Shined shoes is all right fer rookies an' fer dress parades. He'd ought to mud 'em up now an' then jest to feel like a man."

Mention of rookies swung the talk safely back into police channels and the two old friends spent a couple of happy hours in "do you remember?"

A motor stopped before the house, the gate clicked, and a moment later Annette Beauleau entered and greeted the inspector with a smile. "It is a long time since we've seen you," she said, and Sam Crane noted that the smile died from her lips with the words.

"Yes, quite a while. I didn't get up durin' the winter. Keene was laid up with the flu at Fort Simpson an' it left me busier'n a cub bear fightin' bees. Everything's about the same down North. Had some bad fires in the fall an' the smallpox showed up here an' there among the Injuns—thank God it wasn't a general epidemic. You'll recollect old man Leith? I'll bet he's sixty-five, if he's a day—an' doggoned if he didn't up last fall an' marry him his fourth wife. Yup, another squaw—Slavi, this time. The last one was a Beaver an' the one before

that was a Chipewyan. His first wife was white. Had a mess of children by every one of 'em, too—had another baby this spring. Must be twenty of 'em, all told. Damnedest mixed-up family you ever seen. I'll bet he'll be marryin' a Chinee when he's ninety! Father Giroux, he's about the same as ever—always asks after you. Well, I must be goin'. Here it is, clost to midnight, an' I've got to head north in the mornin'."

As the inspector lifted his hat from the rack the girl asked: "Have you seen Brian O'Neill?"

"Oh, sure, I've seen him! Brian's doin' fine! I always knew he would if he'd git that damn education bug out of his head. He stopped in to old Kelly's after he left here an' stayed a few days, an' give Kelly five hundred dollars to take his ma down here to the hospital. They operated on her an' Kelly says she's feelin' better'n she has in years. Well then he went pokin' off God knows where, jest like he used to do before Seth Adams an' his gang got holt of him. Saved a bunch of Injuns that was dyin' of smallpox way up on Selwyn Lake—nursed 'em through, even done their cookin' fer 'em. Time I'd got there he was gone an' he never showed up till fall, when he struck Leith fer a job puttin' up fish. Yup—jumped right in an' put up fifty thousan' fish fer Leith an' twelve thousan' fer Father Giroux! An' he done it in about half the time the Injuns would have put 'em up, workin' alone. When he'd got through with that he outfitted an' hit out fer a trappin' ground he'd found durin' the summer an' he come in this spring with a good catch. That boy knows his stuff. You couldn't pry him out of the North. He's learnt his lesson. Why, when he come in in the fall there was a letter waitin' fer him at Father Giroux's which it said

fer him to come to Ottawa fer a conference with Seth Adams. 'To hell with Ottawa,' he says, 'an' to hell with civilization'—an' he hits back to Chipewyan an' starts puttin' up Leith's fish." As the inspector talked he noted that the girl's face seemed a frozen mask. The beautifully chiselled lips were closed and the hazel eyes were staring—not at him, but through him, as though they were penetrating to far places. He continued, waxing more and more enthusiastic: "An' this spring he's took up guidin'——"

"Guiding!" The word seemed forced from between stiff lips.

"Yup, an' he'll make the best guide that ever hit the rivers. There ain't no one knows the country like Brian does. He can take folks in where no one else could. No, siree! Anythin' anyone's lookin' fer, if it's in the country Brian'll take 'em to it. More an' more every year folks will be comin' North—huntin', an' fishin', an' prospectin', an' explorin'. He'd ought to do well. Take these folks he's got out now. I happened to be at Chipewyan when they hired him. Ten dollars a day an' his grub, they're payin' him. Look like they had plenty of money, too. There's two men an' a woman of 'em. One oldish man, an' a young one, an' a young woman that's pretty as a million dollars' worth of calendars! The old one's prob'ly her father, an' first off I figgered the other was maybe her brother—but by the way he'd look at her an' all I soon seen he wasn't. He better look out, though. 'Cause when Brian got a good look at this young woman it didn't take him no time to make up his mind to take the job of guidin' 'em. An' he ducks into the store an' by-m-bye he comes out all rigged up in a new white jacket with a blue band around it, an' a

blue scarf, an' a white cap with a blue tassel, an' new britches, an' boots. Well when she'd got a good look at Brian you can bet she didn't waste much more time on that other lad, which he looked like he was put into his clothes with a shoehorn. This girl, she's plumb up to date, too. She knows how to wear her clothes—if her boy friend don't. An' she can light a cigarette in the wind as handy as a man."

"And their names—these people?" asked the girl in a voice that sounded toneless and dull. "Is it Latrobe?"

"That's them!" exclaimed the inspector in surprise. "Do you know 'em?"

"I've met them," answered Annette stiffly. And turning abruptly, she flew up the stairs.

"You ought to be shot, Sam Crane!" cried Mrs. Carson when the slamming of the girl's door told them she was in her room.

"At sunrise," grinned the officer. "I jest wanted she should know that the last time I seen Brian he didn't have no mud on his boots."

Chapter XXV

THE LATROBES HIRE A GUIDE

THE Labrobes' association with Brian, of which Crane spoke to Annette, came about in this way:

Hardly had the Hudson's Bay Company steamer *Grahame* warped up at the Fort Chipewyan Landing than Aristide Latrobe strode up to the huge, red-bearded man who stood upon the bank fumbling at a sheaf of invoices attached to a board by a clip.

"Can you direct me to the factor?" he asked.

"'Tis mesel'," answered the man without looking up from his papers.

Latrobe looked perplexed. "I beg your pardon?"

"What fer?" The man had not yet looked up from his invoices.

"I mean, my good man—ah—er—is the factor of Fort Chipewyan about?"

The old Scot looked up and with jaundiced eye regarded the man who stood before him in Norfolk jacket, twilled riding breeches, and high laced boots. The man was fumbling uncertainly with the broad black ribbon of his pince-nez. "'Tis mesel', Angus Leith, that's factor here, as I told ye. Are ye goin' on wi' the boat?"

"No—that is—is there a man hereabouts by the name of Brian O'Neill?"

"Aye, an' lucky ye are to find um if ye're huntin' um. He'll be pullin' oot i' the mornin'."

"Where will I find him?"

From the boat someone shouted a number and the red-bearded man fumbled his papers. "Can ye nae see I'm busy the noo, mon? An' ye ain't goin' on wi' the boat, yer business'll wait."

A silvery laugh caused Leith to look up quickly and behold a vision in tweeds at the elbow of the questioning one. "Come on, Papa. Can't you see the man is busy? Now that we know that this Mr. O'Neill is here we can wait. I am sure Mr. Leith will talk to us later."

"Right ye are, lass!" assented Leith with a smile. "'Twill nae be long an' I'll be wi' ye. Mak' yersel's to home. 'Tis few visitors we hae, an' I welcome ye hearty!"

An hour later, as with a long-drawn whistle the *Grahame* drew away from the landing, Leith approached the three who stood surrounded by a sea of baggage. "Ye said ye'd be wantin' to see Brian O'Neill?" he asked, by way of opening conversation.

"Er—yes. A matter of—ah—business. What sort of a person——?"

The question was interrupted by the girl. "Do you live here in winter, too, Mr. Leith? It must be fearfully cold!"

"Aye. 'Tis cauld, at times. But takin' it one year wi' another, 'tis nae sae bad. Ye'll hae supper wi' me whilst I hae the Injuns git yer tents up. My wife's an Injun. 'Tis the way o' the country. White women are scarce—an' when all is said an' done—women's women."

"We would be delighted!" cried the girl. "But surely it is not time to think of supper."

"Aye—in an hour 'twill be time to eat. Ye've not yet got used to our long Northern day."

As they proceeded from the river bank to the buildings the girl fell in beside Leith, who led the way. "We were wondering," she said, "whether we could induce this Brian O'Neill to act as guide for us. We are not experienced wilderness travellers—not wilderness travellers at all, I suppose. But we would like to see the wilderness and spend a month or more far away from civilization. I suppose that sounds silly to you, Mr. Leith, living here as you do, but to us it means much. We heard that Mr. O'Neill knew the country."

"Aye, lass! Le' me tell ye that Brian O'Neill knows more aboot the country than any mon that ever set foot in it!"

"Do you think we can induce him to guide us? We will pay well."

"Weel, Brian's a queer fish, altogether. I'm nae sayin' he will or he won't. 'Twill be as the notion strikes um. An' ye'd like to see um, ye'll hae time before supper. His tent's yonder beyont the tepees o' the Injuns. He laid up here a few days to make him some nets but I mistrust he'll be finished the noo, an' ye'd better see him before he pulls oot."

Brian O'Neill looked up from his task of putting the finishing touches on a gill net stretched between two saplings and eyed the trio who had come to a halt beside his little tent of green silk. The elder of the three advanced a step, fumbling nervously with the ribbon of his pince-nez. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Brian O'Neill?" he asked.

Brian nodded. "That's my name," he said.

"Ah—just so. We have come a long way to see you and the factor informs us that we are very fortunate in finding you here." He paused, and as Brian made

no comment, continued: "My name is Latrobe—Aristide Latrobe, of Quebec. My daughter, Miss Latrobe. And Bryce, my secretary."

Brian acknowledged the introductions with a nod as Latrobe went on to explain: "Our purpose in coming here is twofold. Primarily it is on account of my daughter's health. Her physicians advised that she spend a summer in the open. We could, of course, have obtained the same result much nearer home but it so happens that my dear wife died a few weeks ago and it is in accordance with a solemn promise made to her upon her death bed that we are here.

"She had a very dear brother who disappeared, and for years was given up for dead. Imagine, then, her surprise and delight when some five or six years ago she received a letter from him stating that he was living with his daughter somewhere in the vicinity of Fort Chipewyan. She wrote, begging him to visit us in Quebec, but never received a reply. The state of her health precluded any thought of her visiting him nor did I care to leave her side for so long a time. Toward the end she exacted a promise from me that after she had gone I should come to Fort Chipewyan and seek out this brother and see if there was not something I could do for him, or for his daughter. In the event of his death I was to search for his grave and arrange for a tablet to be erected.

"Inquiry in Edmonton developed the fact that he was indeed dead—that he met his death by means of an accidental gunshot wound, and that he had been buried near his cabin by one Brian O'Neill. Further inquiry revealed that you were in all probability in the vicinity of Fort Chipewyan, and so we came here in the hope

of finding you and, if possible, persuading you to guide us to the grave of Jovin Beauleau. And also to obtain any information you may have concerning my poor brother-in-law. You knew him well, did you?"

"No. I never saw him till I found him wounded beside the river. His daughter was with him. She had built a signal fire in the hope of attracting the attention of some passing Indian." Brian was surprised at the calm of his own voice. His brain was in a whirl. He remembered the words of Sam Crane as the two had stood over the body of Colbert: "If she thinks he found gold she ain't goin' to let this killin' stop her. . . . We ain't heard the last of this yet." His first impulse was to denounce the man for the liar he was. But—was it possible that the letter Jovin Beauleau had written to his sister contained some real information in regard to the gold? If so could he not, by pretending to play into the hands of these people, secure the gold for Annette? True, Annette was nothing to him—now. But at least he owed her this. Had she not continued to send him money all the time he was in college, when she believed he had gone out of her life forever? These people should be watched every moment they remained in the North.

Latrobe was speaking again: "Will you—ah—engage to guide us to the grave of Jovin Beauleau?"

A bell sounded from the direction of the buildings. "Supper's ready—if you're going to eat with Leith," said Brian. "I'll think it over. You can come back after supper."

"I don't believe Beauleau found any gold," muttered Brian to himself when they had gone. "I panned every bar for miles and never got better than colour. And yet

Colbert believed he did. And these people would never have come here from Quebec without mighty good reason to believe that the gold is here. It may be a pocket. Or it may be on some creek or river that I failed to find."

As Brian finished his supper he looked up to see Celeste Latrobe standing beside the gill net. "And you weave this yourself," she was saying as her fingers trifled with the meshes. "How clever! You must show me how to do it sometime." The rouged lips were smiling and the large dark eyes were looking straight into Brian's. "You don't mind my being here alone, do you? Papa and Bryce stopped to see that the things were properly placed in the tents and I walked on ahead. You *will* take us to the place where poor Uncle Jovin lived, and show us his grave, won't you? It would be a terrible disappointment to come so far and then have to go back without seeing it. And after our promise to Mama and all—why, it would be tragic!"

"Yes," answered Brian. "I'll take you there. When do you want to start?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. McNeill."

"Not mister. And it's O'Neill, not Mac. My name is Brian."

"And mine is Celeste," laughed the girl, "and now that we are properly introduced I know that we shall be great friends."

Feigning embarrassment, Brian mumbled an unintelligible answer as he tossed his dishes into a pan in which water was heating on the coals.

"Here comes Papa, now," said the girl, "with Bryce at his heels as usual. Papa couldn't get along without

Bryce. He calls him his secretary but he's hardly more than a servant."

"I hope you have arrived at a decision favourable to us," said Latrobe.

"I'll go."

"Ah—that is indeed gratifying. And now about the matter of wage?"

"Ten dollars a day and my grub."

Latrobe hemmed and hawed. Brian shrugged. "Take it or leave it," he said, and intercepted the meaning look that the girl flashed at her father.

"Now, Papa," she was saying, "don't be penurious. I am sure it is worth much more than that to us to keep our promise to poor dear Mama."

"To be sure! To be sure!" assented Latrobe hastily. "We may consider the matter settled. When shall we start?"

"Whenever you're ready," answered Brian. "Have you ordered your supplies?"

"No. We are none of us experienced travellers in the wilderness. We shall need your advice in the matter of supplies."

"Might as well go over to the store and order them now. We'll be getting an early start in the morning."

"How long will it take us to reach our destination?" asked Latrobe as they walked toward the store.

"That depends on a lot of things—the size of the outfit, for instance. How long do you expect to stay at Beauleau's cabin?"

"Well, I do not know, I'm sure. Two or three weeks—a month—possibly longer. We expect to remain until my daughter has—er—completely recovered her health."

"We'll need seven Indians. I can hold up my end with the paddle but none of you can. And it'll take four canoes to handle the outfit. We've got two portages, one of more than twenty miles, and one of about two. If the luck breaks right we may make it in five or six days. But we've got about a hundred and twenty-five miles of paddling on the big lake where headwinds may hold us back for a week or more."

"Do you mean to say that we must entrust our lives to such a frail craft as a canoe?" exclaimed Bryce in a tone of such genuine terror that the others laughed.

"I'll go look up the canoes and the Indians," said Brian as he finished checking over the supplies with Leith.

"Oh, let me go with you!" cried Celeste. "I love it—the romance of it," she said as they walked toward the village of tepees. "Don't you love it too? Or is it so much a part of your life that you do not notice?"

"I was born in the North," answered Brian. "It's my country."

"Why is she playing up to me?" he wondered as they walked on in silence. "There is something I know, or at least that she thinks I know, that she wants to find out. It is a game that two can play. I'd like to know, for instance, what was in that letter that makes these people believe that Jovin Beauleau found gold. Colbert was no fool. He wouldn't have come up here on a mere rumour."

"You have not lived in the North all your life?" asked the girl. "Surely you have been to school? You do not talk like those others—the men on the boat."

"Oh, yes, I have been to school at the mission," boasted the man proudly. "I have a good education.

I can read, and write, and figure. And Father Giroux says I can speak English almost as well as he does. But French I do not know, and I do not want to know, for I have heard the French talk many times and their talk is made up of words that sound foolish."

"I am French," laughed the girl.

"You cannot help that," answered Brian magnanimously. "But you are educated, too. You do not have to use the French language. You speak the English almost as well as I do myself."

"Do you really think so?" cried the girl in mock delight. "It is good of you to say so, anyway."

"I generally say what I think. And sometimes it will not sound so good. You do not look like you knew very much and you will do many things wrong. But if you listen to what I tell you, you will learn quickly."

"And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew,"

the girl paraphrased, and Brian replied seriously:

"There you are wrong. The size of the head makes no difference. The head of Father Giroux is no larger than mine, maybe a little smaller, and yet, about some things, he knows even more than I."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. And there is the son of Joe Beechy who lives downriver. His head is as big as a water pail. He is more than twenty years old and he does not even know his own name—but sits and plays all day with little sticks."

At the door of Amos Clawhammer's tepee Brian called loudly, and when a few moments later the Indian appeared he spoke rapidly to him in his own language.

The Indian replied with a grunt of understanding and the two turned toward the post.

"Your friend is not very talkative," ventured the girl.

"I myself said all that needed to be said," answered Brian complacently. "The canoes and the packers will be waiting for us in the morning."

As they approached the store they met Latrobe and Bryce walking toward the tents. "We'll be stirring at four o'clock in the morning," warned Brian. "If this breeze holds we will make good time to-morrow."

Celeste addressed a pleasantry to Bryce, who frowned in return as his glance rested for a moment upon Brian's clothing: the worn shirt of blue flannel, liberally and roughly patched with pieces of whatever cloth had come to hand, the faded blue denim overalls, and the worn moccasins. Brian, too, had intercepted the look, and as they approached the store he glanced shyly at the girl. "I think I shall buy some new clothes," he said. "Mine are nearly worn out."

"Oh, I think that would be splendid! Do let me help you select them. I saw a perfectly darling blanket coat in the store—white, with a broad blue band and a cap to match."

"I will buy that one, if you like it," he answered, "and two shirts, and some pants, and a pair of boots. And you must buy some moccasins. Boots are no good in the canoes. They make holes in the bottom. Your father and that other one must buy some also. We cannot be stopping to patch canoes."

When the purchases were made Brian stood in the doorway and watched the girl make her way to her tent. From the counter Leith combed at his red beard with

his fingers as he stared disapproval. "'Tis nae fittin' thing a woman should be smokin' cigarettes," he rumbled. "I mak' nae doot she's a wild hussy. An' ye'd do weel to gi' her wide berth, Brian O'Neill. Instead o' which ye'll be deckin' yersel' oot like Solomon in a' his glory."

"Oh, she's all right," smiled Brian. "I think she's beautiful, don't you?"

Leith's answer was a snort of contempt. "Ye'll nae be the first mon, Brian O'Neill, to seek his ruin i' a pretty face—nor the last. I watched her at supper, playin' wi' the mon Bryce like a cat wi' a mouse. Wi' a soft glance now, an' again a bold one, only to leave um wi' a look that cut like steel. Ye're a fool to let yon lass o' Beauleau's slip through yer fingers an' tak' up wi' a hard-eyed, cigarette-smokin' wench like her. I'm ashamed o' ye, Brian O'Neill! I hae as gude an eye for a pretty face as ye hae, lad. An' I welcomed her at first. But I hae lived long enough to know that a hard eye in a pretty face spells hell for ony mon!"

Gathering up his purchases, Brian made his way to his own tent beyond the tepees of the Indians, and as he rolled between his blankets he grinned broadly. "What a fool she must think me," he muttered. "And old man Leith thinks so too. Well, the reputation of being a fool is my main asset—if I can play my string out."

Chapter XXVI

CELESTE PRODUCES THE SAMPLES

THE canoes were already loaded with the supplies from the store when the Latrobes stepped from their tents. Brian, resplendent in his new outfit, conducted them to the fire, where the breakfast of bacon and fish and tea and bannocks awaited them.

He swaggered noticeably as he issued a sharp command to the Indians, who began immediately to strike the tents, then approached Latrobe, who was regarding his black tea doubtfully. "One tent's enough," he said crisply. "We don't need three. And we don't need a phonograph, nor that folding bathtub thing. And instead of eight or nine big duffel bags you can get along with one apiece."

"But, my good man!" cried Latrobe, "we have brought along only that which we deemed necessary!"

"You'll have to 'deem' all over again, whatever that means," said Brian. "With the canoes pretty well loaded with grub and a twenty-mile portage ahead of us, every pound counts. If you think you know the country better than I do you don't need me and I'll quit right here."

It was Celeste who interrupted. "No, no, Brian! Of course we don't know the country. Whatever you say goes. I am sure Papa will agree with me. You wait just a minute till I finish my breakfast and I'll help you sort the luggage."

As Brian acquiesced he did not fail to note the look that flashed from the girl's eyes to the eyes of the two men. It was a "leave him to me" look and also it was a look of supreme confidence.

The girl joined him a few moments later as he stood supervising the work of the Indians. "About the tents, Brian," she said, flashing him a coy smile. "You know we couldn't possibly get along with only one. Why, it would be unthinkable that I should not have a tent to myself! There is the matter of sleeping—but, aside from that, you told me I had much to learn—and there is much I want to learn from you. There will be evenings, when the others are tired, that you and I will want to talk——"

With a swift glance of understanding Brian capitulated. "Two tents, then—not three," he said.

"Now—the phonograph," she began. "Don't you think that if we are to be in the wilderness for several weeks, possibly several months, a phonograph would add greatly to our enjoyment? We brought some wonderful records. Don't you like music?"

"Sure I do, when Sister Agatha, at the mission, plays the hymns on the organ. And when old 'Dolph Labrie plays on his fiddle—then everyone has to dance."

"But we have music here with us that is much better than either Sister Agatha's organ or 'Dolph Labrie's fiddle——"

"How do you know?" asked Brian sharply. "You have not heard Sister Agatha and you have not heard 'Dolph Labrie."

"Listen, Brian," said the girl, laying her hand confidentially on his arm. "The very best musicians in the world play and sing to make the records. I don't think

anyone else in the North would understand this—but you will, because you are educated. Surely you know that there are better musicians than those you have mentioned—and if there are you owe it to yourself to hear them. Music is as much a part of one's education as figures or reading or writing."

"All right," he said. "We'll take the phonograph and the records. But we won't pack any bathtubs. And you'll have to leave more than half your duffels."

"The bathtub was father's idea. For my part I much prefer a dip in a lake."

Despite the protests of the men the luggage was reduced by half, the girl siding with Brian over each disputed article. With everything finally stowed, Celeste took her place facing Brian, who was paddling the stern of the leading canoe. Bryce looked daggers as he climbed into another canoe between two Indians, and the girl smiled. "Brian has promised to educate me in the ways of the North," she explained sweetly.

"And I dare say that in the process his own education will increase by leaps and bounds," commented Bryce drily. He added sarcastically: "I already note a marvellous advance in the matter of apparel."

"We must all live and learn," smiled the girl. "Who knows but that even you may get something worth while out of this trip!"

As they shoved off Sam Crane beached his canoe at the landing. "Hello, Brian!" he called. "I'm goin' on upriver. Got any word you want to send outside?"

"No, I don't think there's anything to be said," he answered, and with a dip of his paddle he headed the canoe out into the lake, as Celeste lighted a cigarette and settled back among the luggage.

At the first night's camp Celeste and Brian sat long over the camp fire after the others had retired. "Don't you ever put up your tent?" asked the girl, her eyes on Brian's bed roll that lay upon the shingle near the canoes.

"Only when it rains," he answered. "Why bother with a tent?"

"But—suppose some animal should happen along?"

"What animal, for instance?"

"Why, a—a bear!"

"They often do," laughed Brian. "They just sniff and pass on. Why do people stick to the idea that wild animals are dangerous? There is no place in the North now—nor ever was—when a man can't crawl between his blankets and be as safe from wild animals as though he were locked in any house in the world. Protect yourself from the black flies and mosquitoes and you can laugh at the rest of the animals."

"I suppose one would get used to it," shuddered the girl, "but just being out in the wild country makes one imagine that all sorts of things could come stalking out of the dark. What's that?" she cried suddenly, moving closer as her hand gripped Brian's knee.

"Barred owl," he grinned. "Pretty soon you'll hear an answer."

"How could a person ever get used to it?" she said. "Even with you here I'm petrified with terror."

"Lots of them do get used to it," answered Brian. "And when they know the North they love it."

"I suppose poor Uncle Jovin's daughter knew the North," said the girl. "Tell me about her. Did she live here always? And what has become of her since Uncle Jovin died?"

Brian shrugged. "Who can tell what has become of

her? She went outside after the death of her father. The world is large."

"Outside? Where is outside?"

"Why—all the rest of the world. When people leave the North they go outside."

"You knew her very well—this girl—my cousin?"

"No," answered Brian, staring moodily into the fire. "I did not know her—well."

"Ah—a shattered romance!" laughed the girl. "Come, Brian, tell me about her. Is she beautiful?"

"It is years since she left the North. She was beautiful then—more beautiful, even, than you. And I think you are beautiful."

"Thank you!"

"Why do you thank me? I have nothing to do with your beauty."

"Thank you for mentioning it. It is a compliment."

"One does not need to be thanked for telling the truth."

"What delightful naïveté! And you say this girl was more beautiful than I?"

"Oh, yes. She was much more beautiful."

"What did my Uncle Jovin do for a living?" asked the girl abruptly.

"Oh, fished and trapped, I suppose. That is what people do in the North."

"Did he dig gold?"

"Gold? He said something about gold before he died. He could not speak very well. It was in the throat—his wound. He wanted a pencil and paper but when Annette brought it he was dead."

"Annette?"

"Yes, that was her name—Annette. I think it is a

pretty name. I think your name is pretty too. But, I like Annette better."

"And he couldn't tell you anything about this gold?"

"No. I do not think he found any gold. Many old men who have prospected all their lives think they have found gold. But only a very few of them do find it. He did not have any gold. Annette said that he told her he had found gold, but she never saw any. And after he died I panned the gravel and the sand on many creeks near his cabin. But I never found any gold either. I think he was crazy. Old men get that way—when they have sought too long for gold. I was sorry I could not find the gold. I think Annette needed it."

"Would you have given it to her if you had found it?" asked the girl, her eyes on Brian's face.

"Why, yes—of course. It would be her father's gold. If you should find your uncle's gold would you not give it to Annette?"

Celeste Latrobe laughed. "Indeed I wouldn't! Even if I knew where to find her! If she thought her father found gold why didn't she stay here and search for it? The records show that Jovin Beauleau never filed any gold claim."

"The records?"

"I mean," floundered the girl, "that if Uncle Jovin had found any gold and had filed a claim it would be a matter of record."

"And you examined these records to see? You believe, then, that Jovin Beauleau found gold?"

Celeste was furious. She realized that she had played her game so clumsily that even the suspicions of this boorish outlander were aroused. She hastened to cover, assuming an air of sadness.

"In Uncle Jovin's letter to my poor, dear mother, he mentioned something about gold. As Papa told you this letter was written five or six years ago. So when we promised Mama we would look him up we stopped in Edmonton and examined all available records. Why it was in the records of the police that we learned that he was dead and that you had buried him. That is why we hunted you up at Fort Chipewyan. We do not care about the gold. We have so much money now that we do not know what to do with it. It was only to find poor dear Uncle Jovin that we came—to see if we could not do something to help him. And now that he is dead, if we could find his daughter——"

Brian shook his head slowly. "Annette," he said, "has gone out of the North."

A southeaster, coming up about noon the following day, held them shorebound for a week. With consummate ingenuity Celeste avoided Brian and the evenings were spent listening to the phonograph. During the day, while Brian and the Indians hunted or fished, the girl roamed the beach with Bryce or played cribbage with Latrobe.

Black Bay was finally reached and the work of portaging the four canoes and three tons of outfit took two days more. Other delays followed and it was on the seventeenth day after leaving Fort Chipewyan that the outfit arrived at the cabin of Jovin Beauleau.

The Indians were paid off and dismissed and the four set to work putting the cabin into habitable shape. The girl elected to sleep in the cabin. A tent was set up for Latrobe and Bryce and Brian pitched his own small tent a short distance away. In the evening he showed them the graves of Jovin Beauleau and his wife

on the little plateau beside the banksian grove overlooking the river; and Latrobe waxed eloquent in promising that a fitting tablet should be erected to mark these lonely graves.

Two weeks passed, with Celeste dividing her time impartially between Brian and Bryce. She helped set fish nets and panned the bars and the beds of creeks for gold. And with Bryce she took long walks in the hills.

Latrobe was wont to disappear each morning after breakfast, and several times Brian came upon him during the day wandering aimlessly among the ridges, chipping at rocks with a small pick. So Latrobe believed it was quartz gold that Jovin Beauleau had found? At least he was wasting no time with a shovel and pan in the creek beds. Thereafter, for several days, Brian himself explored ridges—but, as he expected, he found only quartzite schists, hematite, and here and there quantities of quartz pebbles embedded in a conglomerate with a matrix of limonite. He grinned to himself. Latrobe would be welcome to all the gold he would get out of that formation.

One day, as Brian was preparing to set a gill net, Celeste called to him from the cabin. Latrobe and Bryce were off somewhere in the hills and as he appeared at the door the girl invited him to enter. "Come in and have a cup of tea and some of this good cheese. I brought it from Edmonton."

"I ought to get out the net. We have no more fish."

"Oh, bother the net! I'll help you with that later. And besides, I want to talk."

"It is always more pleasant to talk than to work," smiled Brian. "Especially when one may talk with so beautiful a lady."

"You're improving," laughed Celeste. "You'll be a lady killer yet, Brian. That was really quite a nice speech."

"One says what one thinks."

"Until I met you I wouldn't have believed anyone did," answered the girl seriously. "You don't take sugar, do you?"

"No. That is a bad habit. Sugar is just one more thing to carry if you are travelling light. This tea is very weak. You can see the bottom of the cup."

"Try this cheese." She smiled. "I think you will find that strong enough." She removed the cover from a round wooden box of Camembert and passed a plate of crackers.

"This cheese has spoiled!" cried Brian. "We must throw it away."

"Oh, no. That's the way it is supposed to be."

"I think I will have a bannock. I do not like rotten things."

The girl laughed. "There is no accounting for tastes, I suppose. You like strong tea and mild cheese and I like weak tea and strong cheese."

"I could not eat a thing that stinks," answered Brian. "I have seen Indians eat rotten fish."

The girl answered with an audible sniff: "I'd almost as lief eat rotten ones as fresh ones," she said. "I've gotten so I hate the thought of fish—and of almost everything else one has to eat up here. The truth is, Brian, I'm completely fed up on this wild country stuff. I want to go back where one can at least enjoy the comforts of civilization."

"When you have recovered your health your father will probably take you back," ventured Brian.

"My health!" sniffed the girl angrily. "Do you mean

to tell me that you really believed that bunk about my health? Well, let me tell you that the only thing that's worrying Papa is the fact that he hasn't been able to find Uncle Jovin's gold!"

"If he really believes that Jovin Beauleau found gold why does he not hunt for it in the creek beds then, instead of wasting his time among the ridges?"

Celeste lowered her voice and leaned toward him. "Listen, Brian," she said confidentially. "We *know* Uncle Jovin found gold! I feel as though I knew you well enough now to talk as one friend to another. You are a friend of mine, aren't you, Brian?"

"One should feel honoured to have such a beautiful lady for his friend," he said gravely.

"That's twice within a half hour you have told me I am beautiful," laughed the girl. "You are developing rapidly. And I love to have you tell me that, Brian—because I know you mean what you say. And who knows—if we should find gold——" Brian felt his face flush as the dark eyes seemed to devour him in the warmth of their glance. "Because," she was saying, "if we do find it, it will be share and share alike, for the four of us."

"But—there is Annette," reminded Brian.

The girl's eyes narrowed. "We can leave her out of it," she said. "You yourself told me she had gone out of the North. If she believed her father had found gold why didn't she stay here and hunt for it? We know the gold is here but I don't think that Papa and that fool Bryce can find it if they search a hundred years. If anyone can find it you can."

Brian shook his head. "No, I panned the creeks for many miles. I did not find any gold."

For answer the girl rose and, crossing to a duffel bag, produced a box from which she dumped three small rock fragments onto the table. "Did you ever see any rock like that in this country?" she asked.

One by one Brian picked up the fragments, studied them minutely, and returned them to the table again. Slowly he shook his head. "No, I do not think I have have seen such rocks here. But what have these rocks to do with any gold?"

"The gold is in the rocks——"

Brian smiled as he would have smiled at a child. "No, no," he interrupted. "Gold is found in the sand and in the gravel of creeks. Rocks are not gold. If these are what Beauleau found I think your father and Bryce are wasting their time."

"Maybe they are," said the girl. "But at least rock like this is what they are hunting for. I am sick and tired of this country and I want to get out of it. Do this for me, Brian—please. Find the place where these pieces of rock came from. Whether they contain gold or not—at least Papa thinks they do. It is what he is searching for and when it is found he will be satisfied. We will each stake out a claim and then I can leave this God-forsaken country forever!"

"And then I will not see you any more," answered Brian seriously.

Once again the dark eyes were upon him—seemed to encompass him in an all-devouring gaze. "Who knows, Brian?" she said softly. "Perhaps we will go out together. When you have seen something of the world you will never want to come back to—this."

"I will find the rocks," he said gravely. "And now shall we set the net?"

That night Brian smiled into the coals of his little fire. "High grade galena," he breathed. "And heavy with gold. No wonder I couldn't find Beauleau's strike back in the days when I thought all gold was found by pan washing! That stuff must have come from the northward toward the height of land. Probably a dyke running transverse to the quartzite ridges. I'll find it—and the Latrobes can stake their claims!"

Chapter XXVII

THE LOST MINE

For several days Brian prospected the ridges to the northward and succeeded, here and there, in locating shallow shafts and drifts that had evidently been sunk years before by Jovin Beauleau. These showed only iron and copper pyrites of little or no value but their position did show that the trend of Beauleau's workings had been to the northeastward from the cabin. From his wanderings of the previous summer he knew that beyond the height of land lay a broad area of granite formation devoid of mineral.

Brian smiled as he sat upon the edge of the shallow shaft and ate his luncheon of bannocks and smoked fish. Once again, and probably for the last time, he was the trained scientist. He would summon the knowledge he had gained during his four years of gruelling work and he would find the spot where Beauleau had unearthed his vein of galena. He would stake a claim, file it at McMurray, record an assignment, and mail it to Annette in Edmonton—and then—well, maybe Leith would give him a job putting up fish in the fall. Or maybe he would hunt up Sam Crane and join the police.

His thoughts turned to the Latrobes. "The damned crooks!" he muttered. "They haven't got one decent idea between them! But—I'll give them one more chance. If Beauleau's galena vein is big enough to sup-

port several claims and at the last minute they show a willingness to do the square thing by Annette, I'll let them in. But they won't. I'm going to enjoy telling them a few things when I refuse their pay at McMurray."

Filling his pipe, Brian considered his problem. He reasoned that to the northeastward the height of land could not be farther than twelve or fifteen miles from where he sat. If Beauleau had continued to work toward the northeastward what more natural than that he had made his strike well toward the northerly edge of the Huronian and Keewatin rocks, where they gave place to the nonmineral granite of the barren grounds?

Striking a compass course, he proceeded some three miles and ascended a ridge where he soon located another of Beauleau's shafts—a deeper one this time, that followed a crystalline outcrop of augite. By means of two stunted trees lashed together he lowered himself into the fifteen-foot hole and carefully examined the sides and the bottom with his flashlight. The augite altered abruptly to chlorite quartz and in a fissure of the chlorite he discovered a narrow vein of the gold-bearing galena. A hurried examination satisfied him that the vein pinched out at no great distance down. That Beauleau himself had believed this was evidenced by the fact that he had abandoned the shaft. But the veriest fool could see that the vein was, in fact, the galena of the samples, and to Latrobe and Bryce, who knew nothing of dips and pinch-outs, this shaft might well be the enormously valuable mine that they sought. To add to the illusion, a large slab of the ore-bearing rock evidently dislodged from above lay on the bottom of the shaft giving the effect at first glance of a solid floor of rock in place.

Brian climbed from the hole, cursing himself for not having wormed from the girl something of the contents of the letter that had sent first Colbert, and now the Latrobes, into the North. He knew that the letter had divulged nothing of the location of the strike but it certainly must have mentioned something of its value or its extent. Beauleau, Brian now realized, knew rocks —and no man who knew rocks would try to finance so palpable a pinch-out as this narrow vein at the bottom of the shaft.

Curbing his growing excitement, Brian struck out on his course. One other shaft he found a few miles away which showed no trace of galena. Then, well toward evening, he came upon a drift that slanted into a low, broad ridge that paralleled two higher ones. Flashlight in hand, he stooped to enter the low mouth of the drift and immediately froze in his tracks, his heart racing wildly. Not ten feet in front of him the whole face of the drift showed solid galena! And upon the floor were bushels and tons of fragments. With fingers that trembled Brian compared the fragments with the one he had brought from the cabin. They were the same—hundreds of thousands—millions of tons of high-grade ore. And what a location! He withdrew from the drift, and for long minutes his gaze fixed upon the river that rushed noisily northward in a series of low falls and rapids. Unlimited ore! Unlimited water power! And all Annette's!

He sat down and for a long, long time, as the Northern twilight deepened, he stared at the foaming river. "It's a great world," he muttered cynically. "The education that she despised has made her rich beyond her wildest dreams. While to me—who wanted it—who worked so

hard to get it—it is nothing. She, who was so intrinsically of the North as to seem a part of the North has gone out of the North. And I, who fitted myself to take my place in the world of men who use their brains, am putting up fish for Leith! Oh, well . . . to hell with it!"

Brian ate the rest of his smoked fish, built a fire in a sheltered spot, and lay down for a few hours' sleep. In the morning he jerked a fish from a pool in the river, roasted it, and proceeded to lay out and stake a claim. He set his stakes, marked them, and entering the drift, put a hundred pounds or so of the rock fragments into his pack sack. Then he proceeded to the shaft some ten miles distant, where he had found the narrow pinch-out of galena. Dumping the fragments into the shaft, he returned for another load. And it was late in the afternoon that he pursued a roundabout course for the cabin.

"That guide is getting more worthless every day," growled Latrobe as he removed the little box containing the samples from the duffel bag. "It was seven o'clock last evening before we had supper and it is nearly that now—and he hasn't showed up yet. What has he been doing these last few days? And—look here, Celeste! One of these samples is gone!"

The girl smiled sweetly into the irate face. "Yes, Papa—Brian has it in his pocket."

"In his pocket! Do you mean that you have showed him the samples?"

"Why not? You and Bryce don't seem to have scored any very conspicuous success in locating Uncle Jovin's mine. I thought it was time to let somebody search for it who knew the country at least well enough to go out

of sight of the cabin without fear of getting lost. I'm sick and tired of living like an Indian and I want to go home. I told Brian several days ago just what we were up here for—that my ill health was all bunk, and so was your touching speech over Uncle Jovin's grave. I think he was a little shocked at first but you know as well as I do that I can twist him around my finger. I knew I could make use of him sometime. And I have rather cultivated him to that end."

"And rather enjoyed doing it, after dressing him up like a popinjay," said Bryce surlily from the doorway.

"Immensely! I should have been bored to extinction without him!"

"What did he say," asked Latrobe, "when you told him that sample contained gold?"

"He doesn't believe it. He said that gold comes from the sand and the gravel of creeks, not from rocks. I told him that you and Bryce thought the rock contained gold and that it was what you were hunting for, and that if he could find rocks like the sample we would each stake a claim and get out of this country. He promised to find the rock but said that if you and Bryce thought that stuff was gold you were wasting your time."

Latrobe shook his head doubtfully. "It is a matter upon which you should have consulted me. If he is the fool you think he is you have doubtless done wisely. I myself think that he can find the stuff sooner than either Bryce or I. But suppose he should believe that the stuff is gold and should stake out a claim, and——"

Bryce caught the drift of the older man's thought and interrupted with an exclamation of terror. "And go out and file and leave us here! We could never find

our way out! Could never handle the canoes on the big lake if we did! Why, we'd—we'd starve to death!"

"Not I," answered the girl sweetly. "You forget that I have learned how to set nets. And you may rest assured that Brian would never go away and leave me. I have attended to that. He's such a dear boy, Bryce—you should know him better."

When an hour passed and still Brian had not appeared Celeste made tea and the three dined in silence upon smoked fish and bannocks.

Morning came and still no Brian. Again Celeste made tea and Bryce sarcastically remarked, as he ate the badly scorched tinned peas that were set before him, that it was too bad Celeste had not learned to cook fish as well as to catch them. She replied that she would agree to cook all that he could dress and the meal ended with Latrobe roundly berating her for taking the guide into her confidence.

After the men had left the cabin Celeste settled herself to read, but after an hour, during which her mind wandered a dozen times from the printed page, she tossed the book from her and wandered aimlessly about. What was keeping Brian? Never before had he remained away from the camp at night. Could it be possible that her father was right—that Brian was not the fool she thought him? That he had located the Beauleau mine and was even now hastening to record it? What was it he had said about this girl—Annette—Beauleau's daughter? That she should be allowed to share in the mine? A look of anger flashed into the dark eyes as Celeste recollected the episode of the cashier's cage. She had not the slightest doubt in the world that this girl was Beauleau's daughter—her own cousin. But did

Brian O'Neill know where she was? No! The lout had never been out of the North. And he had said he had not known this Annette very well. Manifestly, if he had known of her whereabouts he would have boasted of it, as he had boasted of his mission education and his ability as a guide. And he had dismissed this girl with the mere statement that she had gone out of the North. Well—Annette Beauleau should never profit by her father's mine if she could help it. Once the claims were safely filed she would take the keenest delight in flaunting the fact in the girl's teeth. Impudent piece! She'd teach her to insult her betters! Cashier in a hotel! When the mine was upon a paying basis she would make it a point to maintain an expensive suite of rooms in that very hotel. She would show her!

At noon Celeste drank tea and finished the last of her crackers and Camembert. Later she descended the trail to the river and, remembering Bryce's taunt and her own boast, stepped into the canoe and pushed out to the first net stake. Gingerly she lifted a corner of the net and, after one or two failures, succeeded in lifting a whitefish into the canoe. Putting back to shore, she procured a knife from the cabin, and when the fish ceased flopping she managed, after a fashion, to remove its head and entrails. She carried it to the cabin, built up a hot fire, and, placing a frying pan on the stove, laid the fish therein. There was a great spluttering and a thousand tiny explosions as smoke filled the room with the odour of burning fish. She essayed to turn it but it stuck to the pan, and after much effort she succeeded in tearing it apart, only to be greeted by fresh volumes of smoke. In desperation she jerked the pan from the

stove and carried it hurriedly out the door—to be greeted by Brian O'Neill.

So great was her relief at seeing him that she took no offense at the grin with which he was regarding her culinary effort. "Where in the world have you been?" she cried.

"Out in the hills," he answered with a sweep of the arm that included half the horizon.

He took the pan from her hand and stared at the mass of scorched scales, raw meat, and patches of skin burned to a charcoal. She flushed slightly. "I was trying to cook a fish," she explained. "Bryce intimated that I didn't know how."

"This is probably a new way," answered Brian.

"It's the way I've seen you do it a dozen times!"

"Partly," he admitted. "But maybe you weren't looking when I took the scales off and put grease in the pan."

"I don t know anything about scales," she exclaimed rather testily. "And I thought, of course, fish had its own grease—like bacon. I don't care, anyway. I wasn't educated to be a cook!"

"A little of it wouldn't hurt," said Brian. "There are times it might come handy. I'll show you, if you like."

"Thanks. I'll let you do the cooking. But you had better have a good dinner to-night. Papa and Bryce are furious. But you haven't told me yet where you've been and what kept you so long?"

"Oh, I've been up and down the ridges hunting the place where Beauleau got those rocks. Found it, too. I was pretty tired last night so I just camped where I was."

"You found it!" cried the girl, rushing up and laying her hand on his arm. Brian saw that the eyes that stared into his blazed with excitement.

"Yes, I found it all right. It's a deep hole, down in the rocks. But there is no gold there—only rocks like these. And rocks are not gold." As he spoke he swung the pack sack from his shoulders and, reaching into it, tossed a handful of samples onto the table.

Instantly the girl dived into the duffel bag and, procuring the samples, compared them meticulously. "Oh, they're the same! Just exactly the same!" she cried.

She stepped outside for better light, just as Latrobe appeared around the corner of the banksian grove. The girl returned the fragments to the table and as Latrobe entered the cabin she motioned toward them with a great show of indifference. "Brian has found Uncle Jovin's mine," she said. "I knew, of course, he would do it when he found out what we were hunting for."

Latrobe looked up from the fragments. "Where did you find these?" he asked.

"I took them from the bottom of a hole in some rocks."

"But how did you locate the hole?"

"That was easy. A few days ago Celeste showed me the small pieces of rock and she said they were gold. You may think those rocks are gold. I have seen gold. It is yellow, and it comes from creeks and from rivers, and not from rocks. I told her that, but she said that you believed these rocks to be gold and that you wanted to find them. I knew that if Beauleau had dug up these rocks he must have got them from some ridge. I also

knew that one cannot dig in rocks and not leave plenty of sign that he has dug. So I hunted the ridges, and when I found the hole I climbed down into it and found the broken pieces of rock, and also the rocks from which they were broken."

"Is it far from here?"

"It is only a few miles."

"You have done well, my boy!" cried Latrobe. "To-morrow we will stake our claims! And after that—back to civilization and to the opulence that is the reward of work well done! You may not think that this rock contains gold—but we who are wiser know that it does—millions of dollars' worth of gold! And to show you our appreciation of your part in the enterprise, I shall allow you to stake a claim for yourself!"

"That is kind of you," said Brian. "I will stake a claim if it will please you. But I do not think it will be any good. There is a thing that I was thinking, though, as I walked back to-day. You seem to be good people, in your way. You do not know much but that one cannot help. I was thinking that if you believe this rock to be gold you should file also a claim for Annette Beauleau. It was her father who found the rocks, and if they are of value she should be allowed to have a part of the money. She has been gone from the North for many years, but I should think that there would be a way that you could find her. She did not have much money when she left the North. She was very poor, I think. It may be that somewhere she is now in need of this money that she might receive from her father's mine."

Celeste laughed nastily. "Listen, Brian," she said, "we feel quite competent to manage our family affairs without your suggestions. As I told you before, if this

Annette Beauleau believed her father had found gold she should have stayed here and found it. She repudiated her own father's judgment by leaving the country. She has made her bed—now let her lie in it. Now let us hear no more of Annette Beauleau!"

"Quite so! Quite so!" assented Latrobe.

"Very well," answered Brian. "I thought that maybe you would like the chance to help her. I will say no more."

Next morning the four set out from the cabin with packs upon their backs. Brian explained that at least a full day would be required to reach the shaft, set all the stakes, and properly mark them, and it was decided that both time and labour would be saved by camping for the night at the shaft.

It was a roundabout way that he led, a trail that more than doubled the actual distance from the cabin to the shaft. He had no wish to be asked to explain why he had elected to camp in the open rather than walk the scant half-dozen miles to a hot supper and a warm bed. Nor had he any wish that either Latrobe or Bryce should feel inclined to give the shaft more than a cursory examination which would show a goodly scattering of fragments that had evidently been chipped from the floor of solid galena. He felt sure that neither knew anything of rock—that they had made this journey to find exactly what he would show them—a shaft whose rock matched the samples they had brought with them. Tired men are less inclined to carry on a thorough investigation than are men who are physically fresh; therefore the route Brian selected necessitated the traverse of a half mile or more of particularly dense black spruce swamp, the fording of a shallow fast-water river, the

skirting of a broad and mucky muskeg, and the surmounting of innumerable ridges.

In the lead, Brian grinned to himself as the men behind him sweated and cursed and grumbled. In the rear Celeste plodded on in tight-lipped silence. Twice he dropped back to help her—once in fording the river, and again to lift the pack from her shoulders at the edge of the muskeg and add it to his own, already twice the size of either of the others.

"Men are satisfied when they think they've found what they want to find," he muttered to himself as he regained the lead. "Women are satisfied—never. She's smarter than they are—she'll be less dangerous if she still thinks she's got me where she wants me. Only a little longer—and then to hell with them!"

It was nearly noon when the shaft was reached, and after a hasty luncheon Latrobe expressed his impatience to explore the property. Slipping his flashlight into his pocket, Brian lowered himself into the hole and steadied the improvised ladder while the older man followed. Flashing his light over the rough walls, Brian brought it to focus upon the narrow vein of galena that showed in the chlorite fissure. "It is the same," assented Latrobe judicially. "But it is not of the extent I had hoped to find."

For answer Brian laughed shortly and abruptly turned his light downward. For what seemed a full minute Latrobe stood staring wide-eyed at what appeared to be a solid floor of galena, strewn liberally with chipped fragments. Then a cry escaped him that rang loudly in the ears of the two who knelt above and stared downward into the pit. "My God! The whole ridge is solid ore! Come! Out of this! We must stake the claims

and then lose no time in recording them! Come, hurry, can't you?" he rasped at Brian. "Suppose someone else should come and then beat us to the recorder!"

Brian grinned. "I guess there's no one going to do that," he said, "seeing that it's laid here all these years. And I don't figure you'd lose anything if they did. Gold is found in creeks——"

"For God's sake shut up! You ignorant fool! And let's get out of here!" cried the man, losing his temper completely under stress of excitement. "I don't want to hear any more of your insane mumbling about creeks! Any fool ought to know that for every pound of gold taken from creeks there is a ton taken from mountains!" And Brian grinned broadly as he pushed and shoved and boosted to get the irate man out of the shaft.

"You are the fool," he heard the girl whisper as the man's head reached the level of her own. "Don't you realize that if you should offend him he could pull out and leave us here? Then where would be the good of your mountain of gold? Leave him to me."

An hour was spent on the surface, with Celeste and Bryce and Latrobe going over the ground with a tape they had brought for the purpose, while Brian set up the tent and cut spruce boughs for the beds. He emerged from spreading the boughs to see the girl and Latrobe approaching.

"Papa and I have been talking it over, Brian, " she began, "and we have decided that, since you are the one who really found the mine, you should be allowed to stake the choicest claim."

"Quite true! Quite true!" assented the man. "And also to show you, my good man, that I—er—meant nothing by my—ah—rather hasty utterance of a short

time ago. It was induced, doubtless, by the—ah—rather excited state of my—er—feelings, upon finding that for which we have so long sought. I may, I believe, without seeming to—ah—boast, state that I am a geologist of no mean ability. I am, in fact, considered to stand very high in my—er—profession. By a series of calculations based upon certain measurements we have just completed, I have determined that the vein of ore widens as it approaches the southerly side of the ridge. You will note that the character of the surface rock changes and this shows that what is known as the—er—substratum, or lower rock, which we now know to be ore of immense value, must widen and thicken immensely."

Brian glanced toward the indicated area and saw that the chrystalline augite and chlorite had given place to an amygdaloidal mass inclosing calc-spar, which within a few feet gave place to a greenish malachite that showed copper stains.

Latrobe continued. "We have therefore concluded to allow you to stake the more southerly claim, while we shall rest content with the three adjoining claims which include the shaft and the surrounding property." These latter areas Brian noted showed on the surface the same augite and chlorite quartz that had composed the walls of the shaft.

"Thank you, sir!" he said. "Some day I will show you how much I appreciate your kindness. It is wonderful to me how you can know these things with only a tape line to go by. And it will be more wonderful still to find out that we have found a valuable mine on this ridge."

"Ah—yes. Doubtless wonderful to a poor guide—but to a man of—er—science, the most natural thing

in the world, my lad. And now, if you will fall to with the ax, we will place our location stakes, and properly mark them. I have here a copy of the mining laws pertaining to quartz mining claims, and you and Bryce may place the stakes as I direct."

That night over the huge camp fire that was built to celebrate the staking of the claims the Latrobes and Bryce spent millions, gloating openly over the dead Jovin Beauleau, of whom they spoke slightingly and with sneers. And upon more than one occasion, in the exuberance of her new wealth, Celeste spoke slurringly of Annette, so that Brian, smiling unheeded beside the fire, wondered whether, indeed, the two had not met.

Chapter XXVIII

ANNETTE GOES NORTH

For hours after Inspector Sam Crane's departure from the Widow Carson's, Annette Beauleau lay fully dressed upon her bed and stared up at the ceiling where the street light threw an ever-changing pattern of leaves from the tree outside her window.

She tried to think coherently—to analyze in the light of cold reason this thing that was hurting her so. Why should she care that Brian O'Neill was at this very moment somewhere in the North acting as guide to the Latrobes? Brian O'Neill was nothing to her. He had gone into the North and, as is the way of those in the North, he must earn his living—trapping, putting up fish, guiding—even as she herself was making her living after the manner of those who live in cities. She hated the Latrobes—Celeste Latrobe, the aristocratic, arrogant young woman who had demanded to know the name of her father! "Arrogant, aristocratic, if you will," whispered a little torturing devil in her ear, "but also beautiful and attractive."

"Her eyes are hard!" Annette found herself answering aloud.

"But," retaliated the little torturing devil, "her legs are silken and slender, her lips are red, and her eyes can glow with madonnalike softness—upon one she loves."

"She couldn't love! She would play with him—kill

him—ruin him—and turn him away with a laugh!" Annette sat suddenly upright, staring wide eyed, speaking aloud—realizing her words, yet realizing they were spoken in the half delirium of dreamland.

She glanced at her wrist watch, holding it at an angle that would catch the slanting beams from the street light. It was two o'clock! She leaped to her feet, snapped on the light, drew down the shades, and stepped out of her gown—an exquisitely made thing of pale blue crêpe. For an instant she faced herself in the glass. "What do I care?" she muttered. "What is Brian O'Neill to me?"

"Whose eyes are hard now?" came faintly, as from afar, the whispering voice of the little torturing devil. "—but your legs are as slender and as silken as hers." With a start Annette realized that her glance was centered upon her legs, and she turned abruptly from the glass.

"He's everything in the world to me!" she cried with a dry sob. "And—and if—if I have ruined both our lives—I——" Words failed.

She threw herself into a deep chair as with clean-cut and vivid distinctness thoughts of Brian O'Neill crowded her brain. It was as though she sat in a theatre and watched the drama of Brian's life and her own pass on a screen before her. Tense, almost rigid, she sat, as the high lights of these two lives unfolded before her—impersonal, logical, yet fraught with the most absorbing interest. Always, it dawned upon her, Brian had acted the man—loving her, adoring her, yet always pushing ahead, doing the thing that was the right thing—unyielding as iron, but unyielding for the right. Under the strange spell of the unfolding drama she found herself hating herself for the fool she was. Then suddenly she knew what hate

was! A new figure appeared on the screen—the figure of Celeste Latrobe! And beyond that figure, obscure, somehow—a part, yet not a part of the drama—the suave, smiling figure of Marsden! The illusion vanished. She was upon her feet, staring wide eyed at her own figure in the glass—a tragic figure, it looked, with tight-clenched fists, and jaw set tense.

"If it's tragic I've only myself to thank!" she cried aloud. "Oh, Brian! Brian!"

At nine-thirty the following morning, when Marsden called from the hotel to inquire concerning the whereabouts of his cashier and coveted wife, he was greeted by such an unintelligible confusion of sobs and sniffles and incoherent sounds that he abruptly abandoned the telephone, turned his office over to his assistant, ordered his car, and in three minutes was speeding toward Mrs. Carson's.

Even after he arrived it was several minutes before he elicited anything like a lucid idea from the bewildered and tear-drenched widow. Presently, however, he absorbed the information that one Sam Crane (whoever he was) had related certain facts anent the doings of one Brian O'Neill (whoever he was), and that upon hearing these facts—a Miss Latrobe's name came in somewhere (that name had, somehow, a vaguely familiar sound)—Annette had fled to her room.

Presently the widow settled down to narration. "An' she rapped on my door, an' it jest on the edge of the daylight, an' she come into the room, an' she throwed her arms around me—dressed like any outlander, she was, in a flannel shirt, an' druggets, an' stroud leggin's an' moccasins on her feet! 'Good-bye, Mother Carson,' she says, an' her voice sounded hard an' dry. 'I'm goin'

to him,' she says. 'I love him! I've always loved him—an' it's all my fault! He's fine—the finest man I've ever known! Too good a man to waste puttin' up fish on the rivers. I've got to save him from himself.' An' then she straightens up, an' a look come into her face, the like I never seen before. A killin' look, it was—a look that sent my brain a-reelin' back to them pictures in the old history about hairy men with stone-headed clubs, an' women that hid their nakedness behind the skin of a beast. 'She'll never have him!' she says in a voice hard as a man's. 'That woman! *By God he's mine —mine!*' An' then she was gone."

Marsden stared, uncomprehending. "Gone?" he said. "Gone where?"

For an instant Mrs. Carson's eyes strayed from the suave, bewildered face to the carefully creased trousers, the immaculately polished shoes, and back to the face again. And in that instant other faces flashed into her brain—her husband, Tom Carson of the old Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Sam Crane, Father Giroux, Leith—men, these, real men. And then the face of Brian O'Neill! An unaccountable anger surged within her—anger born of her pride of these men she had known. "Gone!" she cried. "She's gone to the rivers! Back where she come from! Back where she belongs! She's gone to fight for her man!"

"But I do not understand. I—last evening I asked her to marry me. She was to have given me her answer to-day."

"You've got your answer! '

"But she was dressed, you say, like an outlander? And that she has gone to—to take up with this—this

riverman, or fisherman, or whatever roughneck he may——"

The Widow Carson took one step forward, her gray eyes flashed, and a militant finger shook pointedly and very close under Marsden's carefully cropped moustache. "Roughneck! Roughneck, is it? You dare to stand here in my house an' say that Annette Beauleau would take up with a roughneck! Be gone—get out, or I'll scald you out! You an' your fine clothes, an' your automobile, too! Git! Riverman, he may be—an' fisherman! But he's been to a college till there wasn't nothin' more they could learn him! Roughneck! She can thank God he ain't a *damn' dude!*"

Mr. Marsden drove back to the hotel—wondering.

For the second time that summer, during the early hours of the morning, a car bowled northward from Edmonton, conveying a single passenger, who carried no baggage, to Athabaska Landing. And for a second time the storekeeper at the Landing watched that single passenger load an outfit into a hurriedly purchased canoe and push out into the current of the great river as though to the manner born.

"Don't you want a guide?" he yelled as the girl shoved off from the bank.

"Does one need a guide to go home?" she asked, and pushed into the stream.

"It's a damn funny thing," he confided to his clerk. "Him an' her both—they was dressed like downriver folks—an' God knows, the way they throwed their stuff into them canoes an' handled 'em, they must of be'n downriver folks! But both of 'em, their hands was soft lookin' an' their faces white—an' *her!* By God, there

wasn't never no one looked like her on the river—or else I'm goin' down there—you bet!"

Ten days later Annette Beauleau swung her canoe toward the landing of the mission of Father Giroux. The ten days had worked wonders with Annette. The sun and the wind had browned her face and the paddle had toughened her hands and the muscles of her lithe young body. Save at the Grand Rapids and the Pelican, where she had hired Indians to help, she had done her own portaging. She was fit. And save for the bobbed hair and a certain poise that the past five years had given her, she was to all appearances the same Annette who had left the mission upon that January day in company with Inspector Crane and Corporal Johnson.

At least so thought Father Giroux, who rose from his chair on the little veranda of his cottage to welcome her as she approached across the little plateau that was the playground of the children. "Ah, my daughter," he said as the keen old eyes beamed and the thin lips smiled, "I knew that one time we of the rivers should welcome you home!"

Tears welled into the girl's eyes, flowed unheeded down her cheeks. Her heart seemed bursting with a vast, glad happiness. The whiff of tobacco smoke from the long-stemmed pipe, the friendly pressure of the long, lean fingers upon her shoulder, the long hair that fell like a cascade of burnished silver upon the shoulders of the black robe, the light of welcome in the eyes, and the words of welcome on the lips—this was home! For a long moment her eyes swept the horizon of spruce spires and splendid distance—the North!—then closed to picture tinted walls, bronze grills, tiled floors, liveried flunkies, the endless counting of money—a closely

cropped moustache that almost but never quite touched her lips. The City!

"Oh, Father Giroux," she faltered, "I have been such a fool!"

The wise lips smiled in tolerance. "The privilege of youth," they said softly. "But why do you say you are a fool? We are proud of you, we of the rivers—we have gloried in your success."

"Success!" The word was half a sob. "Father, what is success?"

The smile was gone from the lips and in the keen gray eyes was a look of infinite softness. "That is a hard question to answer, my daughter. I think that deep in the heart of each of us the answer lies buried."

"Father, were you always so wise?"

Almost the girl regretted the question. Intuitively she knew she had struck deep into the heart of this man who was her friend. The silvered head shook a slow negative. "Wisdom is bought with a price—the price of experience. I, too, have been a fool—and the years have rolled on."

"A fool!" cried the girl, and impulsively she raised her lips to the weather-tanned cheek. "Why, Father Giroux! Your word is law on the rivers!"

"Aye, my daughter. And happiness has come to me, after many years, in looking after the welfare of my people."

"Where is Brian O'Neill?"

"Sit down. Or maybe you will step to the dormitory and ask Sister Agatha to fetch us tea."

"I'll help her with it!" cried the girl, and sped away while Father Giroux reached for the tobacco jar and meditatively refilled his long-stemmed pipe.

Annette appeared presently with the tray. "Boiled tea, Father—real boiled tea! Oh, Father—it is so good to be home!"

"Aye, my daughter—and good to have you home. Though I'm doubting that we'll be holding you long." The twinkle had returned to the keen old eyes. Annette sipped her tea.

"Where's Brian?" she asked again.

"He is somewhere to the northward, acting, I believe, as guide to a party of—of tourists, or hunters, or something."

The old priest may have expected surprise on the part of the girl but he was totally unprepared for the look of feline ferocity that leaped into her eyes. "Where are they?"

"I do not know. Possibly Leith could tell you. They outfitted at Chipewyan. Sam Crane brought the word—it is a month or so agone."

The girl half rose from her chair but sank back as Father Giroux raised his hand. "I would speak with you, my daughter. In the first place why do you seek Brian O'Neill?"

"Because I love him! Because I have been a fool and have always done the wrong thing! Because Sam Crane told me he has gone back to just what he was before he got his education. Because he's got no business putting up fish! He's got no business trapping! He's got no business guiding! And because the woman he's guiding is—is beautiful—and attractive and—smart! But she'll never get him! He's mine! He loves me and I love him!" The tirade ended with the girl leaning half over the tea table and the hazel eyes staring wide into the understanding eyes of gray.

Father Giroux smiled—a wide and benign smile of perfect understanding. "God bless you, my daughter! And do not allow me to detain you. I had planned an argument with you. An argument having to do with the welfare of Brian O'Neill. It is the will of God that civilization has restored to him that of which he thought civilization had robbed him. We of the rivers will yet be proud of Brian O'Neill, and one or two of us—the best and the oldest friends, maybe—Sam Crane and I—will be prouder still of Mrs. Brian O'Neill!"

"Sam Crane! I hate Sam Crane! It is because of Sam Crane I am here! He came—and he actually *boasted* that Brian had forgotten his education! He *boasted* that he had put up fish for Leith and for you! That he had trapped! That he was acting as guide to the Latrobes! He *boasted* that this girl could light a cigarette in the wind like a man—that she knew how to wear her clothes —and that Brian had got all rigged out in a new suit! I'll throw that suit in the fire!"

"God be with you," murmured the priest contentedly. "There remains little to be said except that I must take off my hat to Sam Crane. He told me he would dip his paddle in!"

"Do you mean——" cried the girl, staring wide eyed into the guileless face of the priest. "Do you mean——" there seemed to be no words.

"Aye," answered Father Giroux. "I mean that Sam Crane loves you as a father. I mean that he loves Brian O'Neill——"

The words were taken out of the aged prelate's mouth. "And I love you both—you two old conspirators!"

Chapter XXIX

IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY

At Fort Chipewyan Leith welcomed the girl with evident delight. "Weel, weel—'tis glad I am to see ye, lass! Comin' fra the city, 'tis sma' folk ye'll be thinkin' us river people."

"Why, Mr. Leith, I'm river people myself!"

"Losh, lass! Ye do look it, the noo, I'll admit. But weel I remember the fine lady ye was when ye met me on the street the time I went outside, an' ye took me to the hotel, an' they gi' me a room wi' a bathtub an' water sae hot 'twould hae scalt a hog. An', lass, it never cost me a cent!"

Annette was smiling. "Where is Brian O'Neill?" she asked.

"Brian? He's off guidin' some folks that come into the country."

"Where are they?"

"I can nae say wheer they be, the noo. 'Tis aboot six weeks agone they pulled oot, wi' four canoes an' seven Injun packers. They paid off the Injuns an' sent 'em back at yer auld cabin, sae it looks like they dinna figure to go much beyont."

"The old cabin!" cried the girl. "What in the world would they be doing at the old cabin?" Instantly into Annette's mind flashed the abrupt demand of Celeste Latrobe that she tell her the name of her father. And

the explanation that followed the demand—that she had once known a man that spelled his name as she spelled hers. Why had the girl made that strange demand? And why had these people gone directly to the cabin of Jovin Beauleau? Could it be possible that there was some connection between these people and that letter her father had written years before? If so why had they waited so long? And what about Colbert?

Leith was speaking, but she scarcely heard him, so thickly did the unanswerable questions crowd themselves upon her brain. "I can nae say why they went to the cabin, lass. I dinna know they had gone to the cabin till the Injuns come back an' told me. They said somethin' aboot spendin' a month or more i' the wilderness. An' the mon said somethin' aboot its bein' fer the gude o' his daughter's health. But losh, lass! For a' I could see she was a healthy jade. She was nae sae hard on the eyes, neither. But losh—ony mon wi' a grain o' sense i' his pate could see she was but a triflin' slut. She ogled the lad that come in wi' um—an' she ogled Brian O'Neill. An' what must Brian do but rig hisself oot in new an' gaudy clothes, the like he would hae made fun o' ony mon wearin', whilst she stands by eggin' him on tellin' him what a braw figure he made! If four years in a college can do that to a mon I'm glad I had nae sae much as stuck my nose in a spellin' book!"

"Mr. Leith, did my father ever tell you that he had found gold?" asked the girl.

"Aye. I mind 'twas the time he mailed the letter. He said he'd found gold an' in a few years he'd be rich. But I dinna pay much heed. He never showed any gold. I'm thinkin' maybe he was a leetle touched i' the head."

"You don't remember who that letter was addressed to that he wrote?"

The old Scot combed at his red beard as his brows drew into a pucker. "No—'tis a long while back. I must o' knowed, oncet—but I've fergot. 'Twas the only letter he ever wrote an' it might o' got lost fer there never come ony answer."

Annette's eyes hardened. "Yes, there was an answer," she replied. "Colbert, the man Brian O'Neill shot after he had killed Johnny Big Fish and was about to attack me, was the first answer to that letter, and I'm not so sure but what these Latrobes are the second answer."

"Losh, lass, ye don't tell me! An' ye think that yer father writ aboot his gold an' the mon Colbert an' these come to git it?"

"Colbert told me that my father had written to his sister about the gold. I do not know the name of my father's sister, nor do I want to know. But it may well be that this girl—this Celeste Latrobe—is my own cousin."

"God forbid! Losh, lass, what a hell o' a relation to have! But relation or no relation, ye'll nae be lettin' her steal Brian O'Neill from ye?"

The old Scot noted the clenching of the fists and the tightening of the muscles of her jaw as she answered: "I have come to find Brian O'Neill. But I want no man who does not want me. I'll go and find Amos Clawhammer now. I'll be wanting a couple of Indians to help me as far as Tazin Lake. From there I'll go on alone."

Cautiously Annette approached the little cabin by the well-remembered trail from the falls. Each turn of the trail had revealed some familiar but long-forgotten landmark—a rock, a twisted banksian—and now the

cabin itself, looking for all the world as though she had stepped from it but yesterday.

She swallowed, but the lump in her throat persisted and she drew into the shelter of a young spruce. For several minutes she waited, eyes and ears alert. But no one was in sight, and no sound came from the cabin. Stealthily she approached and placed her eye to a corner of the window. The cabin was deserted for the moment but manifestly occupied, as supplies and duffel of all sorts were stowed neatly about.

Slipping around to the door, she entered and stood gazing in fascination at the familiar room—the two bunks, the stove, even the pictures she had pasted on the wall when she was a little girl. She glanced nervously out the door. These people might return any time. They were doubtless out along some creek hunting her father's gold.

She was about to slip back into the bush and await their return when the early training of the born outlander asserted itself. Almost subconsciously she noted that there were not sufficient dishes on the shelves for a party of four. Swiftly her eyes roved the room. The blankets had been removed from the only bunk that was being occupied—the other held supplies. Also there were no pack sacks in sight. Evidently, then, these people were away on a trip of some kind. Swiftly crossing to the stove, she felt that it was still warm. It was ten o'clock. They had breakfasted here and then hit the trail. Stepping outside, the girl circled the clearing and in a few moments picked up a fresh trail that led to the eastward.

Before turning into the scrub to recover her own pack sack, she crossed the tiny plateau to the edge of

the bluff and for a long time she stood staring down at the two graves.

Sick at heart, she turned away. Had her father found gold? And if he had was Brian O'Neill helping these unspeakable Latrobes to locate it? Brian O'Neill—her man! Had Brian gone, heart and body and soul, over to the camp of the enemy? If so, she knew and well knew that she had no one to blame but herself. Oh, well . . . she would soon know.

Swinging her pack to her shoulders, she struck out upon the trail of the four. She had gone but few miles until she realized that the trail was bending toward the north. Also, that it was a most peculiar trail for one of Brian O'Neill's woodcraft to make. It traversed a black spruce swamp that could easily have been avoided. Its long, sweeping curve was increasing its length by half. Then, as she topped a ridge, she halted suddenly and flattened herself against its rocky apex. Before her, scarce fifty yards away, grouped upon the bank of a swift rushing river, stood the four she had been trailing. Then Brian plunged in and, feeling his way with a pole, forded to the opposite bank, where he slipped the pack from his shoulders and returned. Latrobe and Bryce took the ford, Latrobe feeling his way cautiously with Brian's pole, with Bryce close at his heels.

Annette's eyes narrowed and her lips pressed tight as she saw Brian stoop, lift the girl bodily, and carry her across the river. She saw the girl's arms close about his neck and she saw the girl's upraised lips smile into Brian's face.

When they topped the next ridge Annette forded the stream. She easily kept the labouring cavalcade in sight. As she plodded on she wondered in an impersonal sort

of way that there was no rage in her heart against Brian O'Neill. Only a dull ache—a pain not poignant but ever present. Not until she had talked with Leith had the thought occurred to her that Brian might prefer this other girl. She realized now that she had come into the North—furiously, grandly—to give herself to the man who wanted her, who had always wanted her; to have him, to save him from accepting, in a moment of weakness, the spurious for the real. But, in the heart of this man, had the spurious become the real? If so . . . well, there was Edmonton. She could marry Marsden. Or go on being pointed out as the highest salaried woman in Alberta.

Again perplexity at Brian's trail method forced itself upon her. He was following the sloppy margin of a muskeg, when a tangent trail would not only shorten his course but would also avoid the muskeg.

Was he deliberately gruelling these people? No, obviously not, for as they reached the muskeg he had dropped back and relieved Celeste of her pack. But why, then, go out of one's way to follow a muskeg? Annette gave it up and followed, keeping to the higher ground, conserving muscles and miles.

At noon they camped on the corner of a low, broad ridge. Creeping as close as the scant timber would permit, Annette saw that all stood for some moments grouped about a certain spot. Then Brian made a fire and they ate their lunch. Annette lay in the scrub and gnawed pemmican, wishing the while for a cup of good black tea.

Luncheon over, the four again grouped about the spot, and suddenly Brian lowered himself to his hands and knees and disappeared. Then Latrobe followed,

and Celeste and Bryce dropped to their knees and, with faces close to the rock, seemed to be peering into a hole.

"The gold!" thought Annette. "My father's mine!" An icy chill seemed to grip her heart. "And Brian led them to it," she muttered aloud.

With a rush came remembrance of what she had heard of Brian's education from Sam Crane, from Father Giroux when he was in Edmonton, and from Leith upon his memorable trip. Seth Adams had written that the college had never turned out a geologist like Brian O'Neill. She remembered that, while she had managed to preserve an air of vast indifference, the news had thrilled her to the depths of her being.

And now Brian had placed this vast knowledge of his directly into the hands of her enemies! At first the thought stunned her. Then, as coherence returned, she summoned a thin-lipped, bitter smile. "Well—why not? What had she ever done to Brian O'Neill but cause him pain? He had loved her—she knew that—and in return for that love what had she given him? Only within the last year had she realized how deeply she had loved him—and she knew, now, that the realization had come too late!

A cry reached her ears from the depths of the pit into which Brian and Latrobe had disappeared. Latrobe emerged, and after him, Brian. Then Brian set to work putting up the tent, while Celeste and Latrobe and Bryce walked about here and there, measuring distances with a tape. Once Brian came within ten yards of Annette, lopping branches from the spruce trees for the beds. She stared in fascination at the white cap with the blue tassel, at the clean new shirt, at the high laced boots. With a shock came the realization that the drawn

look—the look that had added years to his age when she had last seen him that night in Mother Carson's sitting room—had gone. To all appearances he was the Brian of other years—the Brian she had begged to marry her—the Brian who had steadfastly refused because he must first acquire an education. Well—he had his education! He had offered it first to her—and she had scorned it. What more fitting than that it should now be turned against her?

She saw Celeste and Latrobe approach Brian and watched while Latrobe, with many gestures and much pointing, indicated certain sections of the ridge. She saw Brian smile and nod, and noted the look with which he met the smiling eyes of the girl—a conference, doubtless, in which they had appealed to Brian's scientific understanding.

There followed the chopping and setting of numerous stakes and the building of rock pyramids about their bases and much consultation over the markings thereof.

Came the deep twilight that is the summer night of the subarctic. Again Annette chewed pemmican and wished for tea as she watched the others eat supper. When they heaped wood upon the fire and gathered round for the evening camp talk she drew nearer. A wind-twisted spruce, so warped as to have been worthless for stake making, and so coarse of limb as to have been discarded for bedding, served as cover whereby Annette drew close to the fire. Every word was distinctly audible. She heard the gloating over the discovery of her father's mine. She heard Jovin Beauleau ridiculed for the fool he was. She heard her own name mentioned by Celeste and knew that the girl had rightly divined who she was. And through it all Brian, though

he took no part in the conversation, spent no millions, made no boasts, sat smoking his pipe with an approving smile upon his lips!

Annette found her way back to the cabin—found it in the half-dark and by traversing hardly half the miles traversed by Brian O'Neill in leading the Latrobes to her father's mine.

That night she slept in her own bunk. Slept? Rather, lay in her bunk as the high lights of her life, and the life of Brian O'Neill, passed once again in slow review. It was not now—as it had been that night in Edmonton—that these high lights passed as though upon a well-ordered screen. This night they were jumbled—now this, now that, with no order of sequence, nor of reason. This night she knew life in its bitter dregs.

Daylight found her at the falls. Long she stared at the spot where she had dragged Brian O'Neill from the river—and wondered why.

The Indians had left a canoe at the upper portage landing and she paddled across the lake. She covered the long portage to Lake Athabaska and that night she camped with the pounding surf of the big lake as her lullaby.

On the return trip she avoided Fort Chipewyan, and also the mission of Father Giroux. She would not face Leith. She could not face Father Giroux.

Chapter XXX

SETH ADAMS

At Fort McMurray Annette came face to face with Seth Adams. She beached her canoe and started up the bank in the direction of Miss Gordon's store when a man rose from the rock upon which he had been seated and stepped forward to meet her, hat in hand. "Have I not the pleasure of addressing Miss Beauleau?" he asked.

The face was vaguely familiar and Annette summoned her hotel smile. "You have—if it is a pleasure," she said, wondering whether she should know him.

"Indeed it is a pleasure! It is always a pleasure to meet a beautiful and an attractive young lady—and especially a lady of the outlands." The man was smiling —but with so genuine and patently sincere a smile that her first thought, that here was some drummer seeking to impose a hotel acquaintance, vanished. "My name is Adams—Seth Adams, to be exact. And I believe that I had the pleasure of meeting you some five years ago at Fort Chipewyan."

Seth Adams! Dear God in heaven! That she should meet, at this time, and under these circumstances, the man who more than any other had been the cause of Brian's leaving the North—of his leaving *her !*

Annette stood rigid while the blood froze in her veins.

And then the poise born of five years of contact with a sophisticated world dropped from her as a mask. A gleam of savage hate was in the narrowed hazel eyes and from savage, twisted lips came the word: "*You!*" and again: "You!"

The man smiled. And with that smile, unaccountably, the sudden flame of rage was quenched. It was as though Father Giroux had smiled.

Annette stared into the kindly eyes that smiled into her own flashing ones above the neatly trimmed gray imperial. "Yes—me." And, somehow, the girl knew that this man had deliberately used the ungrammatical form. "I think there are things we should talk about."

The girl remained silent—waiting. And Adams resumed: "Anything that affects Brian O'Neill affects me. And I have not forgotten that upon an occasion Brian O'Neill killed a man with his bare hands who had presumed to lay hands upon you. And I understand from good authority that he had killed another for the same reason. Therefore you must mean something to Brian O'Neill—and, therefore, you must mean something to me."

"And yet—you have let Brian O'Neill go back to just what he was before your *damned* education got into his soul?" With her words Annette's excitement grew. Anger got the better of reason and she raved on: "You took him out of the North and you have flung him back into the North! You have educated him—they tell me that your college never turned out a better man! A better man for what? For putting up fish for a Hudson's Bay Company post? For trapping fur? For acting as guide to any chechahco that comes into the country? There's your Brian O'Neill! You'll find him boiling tea

for tenderfeet! Making their beds! Waiting upon them like any bell-hop! Why didn't you give him a position in some way commensurate with the things he knows? What is there in the North for him? He belongs in the North—and he will never go out of the North!" From sheer want of breath the girl paused.

Seth Adams was still smiling. "For which may God be praised, my dear. Also—I think that no woman is ever more beautiful than when in an honest rage."

Something—the smile, the tone of the voice, the kindly gray eyes, the thing that was the man—steadied Annette. The flame faded from the hazel eyes and she found herself regarding this quiet, smiling man seriously. "Will you be seated?" he said.

And Annette seated herself upon a stone. "It may be natural or unnatural that you are part and parcel of the general panic," he began, to the utter bewilderment of the girl. "If I trespass upon the grounds of good taste I know that you will set me right. So far as I know I am speaking to one who has, even more if possible than I myself, the interest of Brian O'Neill at heart." Seth Adams paused. Annette remained silent. The man continued: "As you may know, in my official capacity I must direct the activities of many men. These are specialized men—men who are trained to do certain things and do them well—thoroughly. There must be no mistakes. These men are scientists—and it is of vast importance to the government that they do their work well."

Again the man paused and Annette asked: "You said a general panic—I don't know what you mean by a panic?"

Seth Adams's smile widened to a hearty laugh. "I

mean just this, my dear lady: That everyone on the three rivers has been pestering hell out of me for the past year because Brian O'Neill is doing just exactly the thing that I want him to do! Just the thing that I sent him up there to do. Father Giroux wrote me about him. And even old Sam Crane tried to call on me in Ottawa."

"But," interrupted the girl, "you did write Brian a letter to come to Ottawa for a conference. Sam Crane told me you did."

"I did. I could have used him to good advantage to myself, on a job for which I had no liking. It was a Northern job—specific information demanded by a saphead Parliament—about nothing that amounted to a damn. Brian could have saved me the trip. He didn't."

"But surely you know that Father Giroux and Sam Crane and—I are friends of Brian O'Neill! Surely you know that we have his best interests at heart. And you know that we know the rivers."

Again the lips above the gray imperial smiled. "All that I well know. *But I didn't know Brian O'Neill!*"

The girl gasped. "What do you mean?" she asked, the hazel eyes on the shrewd eyes of gray.

"I mean just exactly what I say. I picked Brian O'Neill—I picked him on account of his lineage. I picked him because he had been born in the North, and because he had always lived in the North—because he was of the North! I picked him because he was the only man I had ever seen in the North whose brain seemed to be worth a damn! (You will pardon the French, I'm sure.) I took him out of the North. I directed his education—or tried to. But I found out that

the scoundrel learned half again as much as I planned for him to learn. Then I sent him back into the North! There are commercial enterprises in Canada, Miss Beauleau, that will pay Brian O'Neill almost any salary he will name to have him on their pay roll. I know that Brian knows that. I sent him into the North to take the gaff, to weigh what civilization can give him against what the North can give him. I sent him up there knowing that all his friends would damn me. I sent him up there, knowing that every friend he had would deplore the fact that he still stayed in the North. You know, Miss Beauleau, there is a final test that they give steel—a super test that is used for very special purposes. This steel would look all alike to you, or to me, but when the time comes for it to stand the stress and the strain for which it was smelted and devised it has got to make good. That was the stress and strain I purposely put on Brian O'Neill. He has withstood for a year the offers of mercantile corporations. He has withstood the pleadings of people he knew to be his friends. He withstood my direct summons to meet me in Ottawa."

"And what for?" asked Annette logically. "So he can get out Mr. Leith's fish?"

"Just so," answered Seth Adams. "So he can get out Leith's fish—or do any other job that ever comes up in the North to do!"

For a measure of minutes Annette sat and regarded Seth Adams. And for a measure of minutes he sat and took the scrutiny. He lighted a cigarette, offered Annette one, and she smoked.

"And suppose he stands the stress—what then?" she asked after a few moments of silence.

"Then," answered Seth Adams, "he will be the director of the Geological Survey of Canada."

Annette choked up. "Do you mean, Dr. Adams——"

"My dear lady, I have been trained to say nothing but what I mean. I will explain. I am growing older—men do. I have enjoyed my work—loved it. I am so deeply interested in it that I cannot turn it over to any ordinary man. I have certain influences that know that I love my work for my work. You may call that politics if you will but when it is used as I am using it—I think it is good politics. I have been asked to name my own successor. I have named Brian O'Neill. In my opinion he has stood the stress and the strain. I will take the onerous departmental job off his hands. I shall remain Director Emeritus. I feel that the full title should be with the field officer. He does the work!"

There was a long pause as both sat gazing out over the blue waters of the broad Athabaska. Seth Adams lighted another cigarette. So did Annette.

"What's bothering you, lady?" he asked.

"Nothing," answered the girl. "I wish Brian O'Neill every success."

Seth Adams, the suave presenter of claims before Parliament, the sophisticated director of the Geological Survey of Canada, blew up. "What's the matter?" he cried. "Damn it! We've got to get down to facts. Rip my title off—rip off your damned sophistication—let's get down to cases. What about Brian O'Neill?"

Something in the man's attitude, something in the fatherliness of him, captured the girl's imagination—and she told him all she knew. When she had finished Seth Adams smiled.

"We will wait here for them to file," he said. "They must come here to record. If it is as you think we will both go back together. Canada stands in need of real men—and women," he added, so quickly as to cause Annette's eyes to glow.

Chapter XXXI

THE NEW DIRECTOR

FOUR days later came an outfit from the North. Latrobe was the first to set foot ashore and he was the first to attempt claim of attention from that time on. The fact that his daughter was not only beautiful but knew how to capitalize her beauty was the only drawback. Latrobe had found gold. He had found lots of gold. He had found unlimited supplies of gold. He had staked his claim and had recorded it. His daughter had filed, and his secretary. The outfit was rich—undeniably, disgustingly rich!

In a little corner of Miss Gordon's store—where only certain people ever foregather, Seth Adams and Annette waited. They had watched the rush to the recorder's office and had seen the air of opulence that actuated Latrobe's every move.

Latrobe summoned Brian O'Neill. "Ah, guide, what do we owe you?"

"Not a damned cent," said Brian O'Neill.

Seth Adams looked at Annette Beauleau knowingly, but she saw only that Brian was refusing pay on account of Celeste.

Adams smiled. "I know the Latrobes," he said. "They are an old family in Quebec—too damned old!" He walked out of Miss Gordon's store, closely followed by Annette.

Almost instantly Latrobe gushed forward. "Why, my dear Dr. Adams!" he exclaimed. Beside him was Celeste, and a pace back, Bryce.

"Hello, Brian O'Neill!" cried Seth Adams to the guide, who hung in the background.

Aristide Latrobe was astounded. He was floored. That the mighty Seth Adams, the director of the Geological Survey of Canada, should flout him, Aristide Latrobe, to speak to a mere guide was incomprehensible—to Aristide Latrobe. Aristide Latrobe was not used to being flouted. But if Aristide Latrobe was dumbfounded, imagine Celeste when Brian O'Neill paid no attention whatever to the greeting of the mighty Seth Adams but walked over to the young outlander woman who accompanied him. Celeste took a swift look and was astounded to see the girl she had faced across the grilled cage in the Edmonton hotel. The face of Annette Beauleau!

The moment was tense with human emotion. Then Brian spoke:

"Miss Latrobe, permit me to introduce my fiancée, Miss Beauleau—your cousin." Celeste staggered. Was this the voice of the guide—the uncouth outlander who had boasted of his mission education? Who was this man who would turn down recognition by the mighty Seth Adams to talk to a girl. And what girl! The cashier of a hotel!

Annette also was staggered. That this man who, only a few short days ago, had listened to the revilement of her father and of herself with a smile on his lips was calmly introducing her as his fiancée——!

Celeste broke the silence with a laugh. "So, you are the daughter of my dear Uncle Jovin? I suspected as

much when I saw your name displayed at the hotel—a manicurist, was it not?"

"Yes," answered Annette quickly. "It was not."

Celeste was furious. "So you are the daughter of my mother's scapegrace brother, Jovin Beauleau?"

"I do not even know the name of my father's sister—if he had one," said Annette. "But if he did I think I can see why he chose the outlands."

Stung to fury, Celeste cut loose: "Oh, he had one all right! One who was smart enough to put aside a letter your father wrote several years ago! A letter that told of his finding gold in the hills north of Lake Athabaska. Even so we might never have found the gold had not your most amusing yokel, Brian O'Neill, played into our hands and most accommodatingly discovered your father's mine! Father and Bryce had hunted for it for weeks and could not find it, until I hit upon the perfectly simple and perfectly obvious way—merely to give the guide a sample and tell him to go and find it! Your father found the gold—but we will spend it! I wish you joy in his memory!"

All had listened to the girl's outburst and instinctively all eyes centred on Brian O'Neill.

"H-u-m," said Brian—and puffed a cloud of blue smoke from his pipe.

"And," supplemented Latrobe, "the claims are all safely filed."

Then Brian laughed. He turned to Annette, who had stood white faced through the ordeal.

"Your cousin is right. Your father found gold—and such a vein of gold as I think has not been uncovered in years. After your father's death I prospected for the gold he said he had found but I could not find it be-

cause then I thought that all gold was panned from the sand and the gravel of creeks. Then I forgot about his gold—I thought, like Leith and Sam Crane, that he was a little touched in the head; until these people came along. They were so obviously not what they claimed to be that I took the job of guiding them. I knew they were hunting your father's gold—but I didn't think they had a chance till one day Celeste showed me a sample that Beauleau had sent to his sister. After that it was easy. I knew exactly what to hunt for—and where to hunt for it. I found it. I knew the people I was working for were crooks and four-flushers and that made it easier. I found an old prospect hole of Beauleau's, and later I found his real strike—and it is a strike! Millions of tons of high-grade galena—all in sight. I carried back a couple of sacks of the chips from the real claim and salted the old abandoned shaft. Even after that I figured I'd give them a chance to be halfway square—but it wasn't in them! They've got a couple of hundred pounds of back-packed samples—that's all. Of course I had to know my people to put over a fool deal like that—but I did. It worked."

"What do you mean?" cried Latrobe, livid with rage. He turned to Celeste. "What is the fool talking about? What does he know of gold? Why, the fool——"

"Just a moment," said Seth Adams. "While introductions are in order I take pleasure in presenting to you Mr. Brian O'Neill, the new director of the Geological Survey of Canada."

THE END